

**Finding the Poem Inside the Play:
Robert Brustein's Theory and Practice
of Ibsen's Drama**

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Part 1
INTRODUCTION

POINT OF DEPARTURE

I soon noticed that in Anglophone academic circles the bare mention of Ibsen's name tended to elicit responses marked by boredom, disdain, or condescension...In the Anglophone world it is still shameful for a literary critic to reveal that he or she knows nothing about Baudelaire and Flaubert. Why, then, are so many critics convinced that ignorance of Ibsen is just fine? (Moi 1)

Outside Norway, no major literary theorist has written at length on Ibsen since Raymond Williams in 1969. The late cultural sociologist Pierre Bourdieu would surely have said that these are signs that in the English-speaking academy today Ibsen does not bestow much distinction on critics who work on him. Intellectuals started to experience Ibsen's plays as increasingly old-fashioned, and boring after World War II. (Moi 17-8)

With these words, Toril Moi ignores Robert Brustein's nearly half-century of engagement and contribution to both Ibsen scholarship and performance in America.

Errol Durbach notes that "Ibsen exists in two distinct domains which all too seldom invigorate each other: on the page and on the stage, in scholarly contemplation and in the theatre where the drama's complex meanings evolve..." (Durbach 247). Although Ibsen was a playwright, director, and man of the theater, the field of Ibsen scholarship has largely ignored the contemporary staging and performance of his plays.

My goal is to create a dialogue between Ibsen scholarship and performance by investigating the work of Robert Brustein. He is one contemporary example of a scholar-practitioner who bridges the gap between Ibsen theory and performance. In this thesis I therefore want to investigate American theater scholar, drama critic, producer, director and educator Robert Brustein's contribution to Ibsen Studies. In what ways did Brustein's theoretical understanding of Ibsen as expressed in his writings *Ibsen and Revolt*, *The Crack in the Chimney*, *The Fate of Ibsenism* and his subsequent work, influence and contribute to the Ibsen productions at the Yale Repertory Theatre (YRT) and the American Repertory Theatre (ART)? In what ways have the productions influenced his theory?

Durbach credits North American Ibsen scholars Frederick and Lise-Lone Marker as the scholars who have explored the relationship between the two domains in their 1989 book *Ibsen's Lively Art: A Performance Study of the Major Plays*. They argue, "Each succeeding generation seems to discover – or rediscover – elements in his work that renew the dialogue in which the past and the present continue to meet. Theatrical performance is the true meeting place where these elements in a dramatist's work are tested" (Marker ix). My thesis will use the Markers' lens to explore the elements of Ibsen's work which were underscored in Brustein's productions. My aim is not only to create a dialogue between the productions, but also between Brustein's written theory on Ibsen and the theory in practice. I hope ultimately to underscore his importance in influencing how American theater practitioners and scholars approach Ibsen.

Though they are North American scholars, the Markers almost completely ignore American contributions to Ibsen theater and productions of Ibsen. They do briefly mention one American company, the short lived American Ibsen Theatre (AIT), a summer repertory company which existed from 1983-85. Ibsen scholars Rolf Fjelde, Brian Johnston and Leon Katz were heavily involved in its creation. The Markers describe the AIT's approach to be:

boldly stylized...assertively rejected both the drawing-room stage and the politely restrained 'underplaying' that traditionally goes with it (not least in the North American theatre). At least two decades before this venturesome group started showing in Pittsburgh audiences a 'new' Ibsen, however, European directors and designers had begun in earnest to challenge the conventional approach whose outward sign was the museum-like reproduction of a quaintly cluttered Victorian parlor. (ibid 76)

Several important pieces of information are implied in the above quotation. First, that in the United States, in contrast to Europe, it had taken much longer to develop an alternative approach for staging Ibsen's works. They do not mention it, but the associate director of AIT and its most noted stage director was Travis Preston. Preston was a student of Brustein's at Yale and learned from Brustein's approach as the assistant director for *The Wild Duck* at YRT in 1978. Furthermore, several of the founding members of the company had studied at Yale right after Brustein left. Second, that it was Robert Brustein's students who were at the forefront of this new approach.

The Markers' silence on Brustein himself, and his contribution to the contemporary understanding and staging of Ibsen in America, speaks volumes. The Markers were right – in America, there had not been an Ingmar Bergman presenting audiences with an alternative approach to Ibsen. But they ignore Brustein's pioneering of new approaches to staging and understanding Ibsen in the United States. One of Brustein's goals at Yale/YRT and Harvard/ART was to introduce a European aesthetic and approach stemming back to Reinhardt, Meyerhold, etc. (Brustein, *The Lively ART* 76) and personified in the contemporary context by the likes of Ingmar Bergman to the American consciousness. Even his decision to link conservatory training with a professional theater company was also influenced by what he had seen in England.

Brustein was one of the first American critics to advance "this poetic Ibsen." (Elinor Fuchs, *ISA* 5) In the fall of 1992 the Ibsen Society of America, chaired by Rolf Fjelde, invited Brustein to be their guest of honor. Brustein had previously delivered the keynote address at the 1978 New York Ibsen Sesquicentennial Symposium. It is a lecture which Fjelde described as being "brilliant and seminal." (ibid) Brustein, often called 'the Dean of American Theater', is the author of several important articles on Ibsen starting with "Ibsen and Revolt" (1962) which was later published in 1964 in his first book, the critically acclaimed National Book Award finalist *The Theatre of Revolt*. Rolf Fjelde called his "trenchant book[s...] part of that small but accumulating basic library assaying what our theater is all about." (ibid 3) It is a book which is taught in universities until today.

As one of the first American critics to advance a poetic reading of Ibsen, he has continued to develop his ideas on Ibsen as reflected in his 1977 essay "The Crack in the Chimney" (revised in 1978), "The Fate of Ibsenism" and other Ibsen-focused essays. In stark contrast to Moi's claim of boredom by Anglophone critics, Brustein already in 1965 wrote to Fjelde, "Ibsen is one who never seems to grow tired or old-fashioned, despite what his enemies, who never read him, say." (ibid) Brustein understood Ibsen's centrality in American theater. The choice of interpretation of Ibsen's dramatic method would have major ramifications for the development of American theater as a whole.

It is not a coincidence that for Brustein's revision of his essay "Theater in the Age of Einstein: The Crack in the Chimney," he re-titled it "Reimagining the Drama" and used it as the introduction to his appropriately titled book *Reimagining American Theatre*.

Generations of both literature students and conservatory students have studied Brustein's interpretation of Ibsen. He has taught literature at Cornell University, Vassar College, Columbia University, Yale University and Harvard University, was a Senior Research Fellow at Harvard, and has recently joined the faculty of Suffolk University's College of Arts and Sciences as a Distinguished Scholar in Residence. He still teaches at the Institute for Advanced Theatre Training and is a creative consultant at ART. He is an award-winning theater critic, has published 15 books, four adaptations of Ibsen's plays – two of which have been published – and has had his writing on Ibsen included in such collections as *Penguin Critical Anthologies – Henrik Ibsen*, which was edited by James McFarlane.

But Brustein's interest in Ibsen is not solely academic. Like Ibsen himself, Brustein is a theater artist. As a scholar-practitioner he "transformed Yale School of Drama from a graduate school that primarily prepared students to become teachers for America's academic theatre community, into a professional school that trained its students for the professional theatre." (Plotkins 1) He established the affiliated professional Yale Repertory Theatre (YRT), which became "a laboratory for explorations in Brustein's modernist aesthetic" (ibid 2) and was a "theatre devoted to uncovering neglected drama and developing new production approaches." (Brustein, *Making Scenes* 227)

Brustein's *The Theatre of Revolt* even influenced his development of the acting training at his conservatory.

We devoted each year of an actor's training to a different style, beginning with Stanislavsky realism. Poetic realism we called it, because we didn't want this style used for the production of William Inge or Oliver Hailey—we wanted it for the production of Chekhov, Ibsen, or Strindberg...this was combined with a script analysis course in which we studied the works of Chekhov, Ibsen, and Strindberg from the point of view of the actor rather than the literary historian or critic. (Brustein/ Flannery 97)

Regarding the above acting training, Brustein told me in our interview that they followed this program at Yale “in the last three years. We had three years of it and it worked, because we had a terrific class out of it. Even today, they are the most versatile actors we ever produced.” (Brustein)

Brustein’s challenge in teaching and producing Ibsen was that in the Vietnam and post-Vietnam War era, the American avant-garde disdained classics such as Ibsen and mainstream American drama, embodied by Arthur Miller, which was its offspring. Judith Malina, the legendary artistic director of The Living Theatre which had been in residence at the Yale School of Drama, “announced that she did not want to play Hedda Gabler anymore, she wanted to play Judith Malina.” (Brustein, *Lively* 70) The avant-garde had “turned against culture, it turned against history, it turned against text.” (ibid)

Brustein was very interested in the avant-garde. He had been bringing some of the leading figures to work with his students and at his theater since the start of his deanship at Yale. However, he felt that by the late 1960s and 1970s American theater, both mainstream and avant-garde, was in a crisis. Essentially, Brustein presented an Ibsen who is theatrically compelling for the (avant-garde) theater director to engage. This was particularly important in the American context where, in contrast to Europe, Ibsen was often perceived as solely realistic and conventional.

Brustein’s mission in his school and theater was to address this crisis. He aimed to create a theoretical construct and a physical safe space for the avant-garde to reengage with classic texts. His article “The Fate of Ibsenism” was part of that attempt and each production staged by YRT and ART would attempt to honor that aim in variety of ways.

At Brustein’s “laboratory”, his theaters, he produced a total of seven Ibsen productions, including the Robert Wilson staging of *When We Dead Awaken*, which Brustein commissioned and adapted; *When We Dead Awaken*, directed by Thomas B. Haas in 1971; *The Wild Duck*, directed by Brustein in 1978 at YRT; *Ghosts*, directed by Brustein in 1982; Robert Wilson’s *When We Dead Awaken* in 1991; *Hedda Gabler*, directed by Adrian Hall in 1992; *The Wild Duck*, directed by François Rochaix in 1996; and *The Master Builder*, directed by Kate Whoriskey (with Brustein) in 1999 at ART. These are the productions which will be analyzed in

this thesis. In addition, both the Yale School of Drama, which Brustein revitalized, and the Harvard-affiliated Institute for Advanced Theatre Training at ART, which he founded and where he taught Ibsen, trained several generations of American actors, directors, dramaturges, and designers. In 1989 a professionally directed production of *Peer Gynt* was staged at the Institute for Advanced Theatre Training at ART with the acting students. Several students also directed their own Ibsen productions at the school.

Brustein, who had developed one of the “crucial” (Durbach 248) approaches to Ibsen, directed YRT’s production of *The Wild Duck*, ART’s production of *Ghosts*, and co-directed its final Ibsen production, *The Master Builder*. He wrote the adaptations of *Ghosts*, *The Wild Duck*, *The Master Builder* and *When We Dead Awaken*.

Rick Davis, the founder of The American Ibsen Theater, emphasized Brustein’s importance as someone who bridged the divide between Ibsen scholarship and performance in the United States. “Brustein's work, especially ‘The Crack in the Chimney,’ remains an important contribution to the shift in Ibsen studies and production away from a purely psycho-social, realistic approach and toward something more mysterious, theatrical, and liberating.” (Rick Davis)

LITERATURE REVIEW

Robert Brustein describes *The Theatre of Revolt* as “a study of metaphysical rebellion in the drama, rather than of social or political revolt...it embodied [his] conviction that trying to change society was impossible without a change in the basic nature of humankind.” (*Scenes* 8)

Ibsen is the beginning of this revolt. The book embodied

many of my aesthetic and philosophical beliefs, particularly a commitment to modernism, and an Ibsenite conviction that gradualism was a form of compromise. For me, the theatrical idea of seven great modern dramatists—Ibsen, Strindberg, Chekhov, Shaw, Pirandello, O’Neill, and (together with Artaud) Genet—had almost become the basis for a personal religion; they were the later day aesthetic at Yale. The distinction I tried to make between revolt and revolution was a difficult one—revolt having to do with ideas and the imagination, revolution with political action. (ibid)

For Brustein, Ibsen is not simply a subject to study but an

intellectual or artistic forebear[er] that I wouldn't want to be ashamed of me...I have made a complete identification [with him] intellectually, and I try to lead my professional life, to some extent my personal life, in accord with what I think to be his precepts...And it's hard to have Ibsen not ashamed of you because it's easy for him to be ashamed of you. And it's also hard when, as you point out, I got into the world of action rather than contemplation. The world of action is a world of compromise, a world of dealing a lot with people, and limited time. (ISA 10-11)

He explored Ibsen not only as an artistic model for himself and the American theater, but also as a model to understanding artists' relationship to government and civic duty in a democracy. In his books – from *Theatre of Revolt* in 1964 through his collections *Seasons of Discontent*, *The Third Theatre*, *Revolution as Theatre*, and *The Culture Watch*, to his 1978 essay “The Artist and the Citizen” and onward, Ibsen serves for Brustein as the civic model as to how a country and a citizenry should conduct themselves.

In *The Theatre of Revolt* Brustein discusses Arthur Miller's adaptation of *An Enemy of the People*, and he is highly critical of Miller. Fundamentally, Miller, who is widely considered one of the great American playwrights of the twentieth century, is in Brustein's view the embodiment of what is wrong with American theater. Central to this thesis is his belief that Miller misunderstood Ibsen's contribution to modern drama and thus perverted it. In “Ibsen and Revolt” he criticized Miller on two accounts. Brustein disapproved of how Miller:

bowdlerized *An Enemy of the People* for the Broadway stage...in order for the work to fit his liberal-democratic Procrustean bed, Miller proceeds to lop off its more radical limbs (Ibsen's line ‘The strongest man in the world is he who stands alone,’ for example, becomes in Miller's adaptation ‘We are the strongest people in the world and the strong must learn to be lonely’—a mere copybook maxim.) (*Theatre of Revolt* 72)

In his 1978 essay “Theatre in the Age of Einstein: The Crack in the Chimney” (which was revised as “Reimagining the Drama” in 1990) Brustein attacked Miller, a self-proclaimed Ibsen disciple, in whose plays the action is causal and realistic. While both Miller and Brustein appreciate Ibsen's mystical and poetic qualities, in regards to causation in Ibsen's plays, they ultimately are at odds. Miller wrote “What is precious in the Ibsen method is its insistence upon

valid causation, and this cannot be dismissed as a wooden notion.” (Miller 227) In contrast, by 1978, Brustein had developed a radically different view which fundamentally questioned the idea of causality in Ibsen’s plays. I will analyze the development of this idea in greater depth later in my thesis.

Brustein makes the groundbreaking argument that the dramatic action in Ibsen’s plays is not causal; it is not the crack in the chimney that sets the house in *The Master Builder* aflame:

In short, the premise underlying Miller’s themes and actions are not Ibsenite in the least. They belong to the eighteenth century, which is to say to the age of Newton, rather than to the twentieth century, which is the age of Einstein...In each of Miller’s plays...it is the crack in the chimney that sends the house up in flames. (*Critical Moments* 114)

His radical interpretation of Ibsen and scathing attack on Miller were not relegated to the pages of an academic journal, but were first presented as the front page article of the August 7th, 1977 Sunday Arts & Leisure section of the New York Times - the newspaper of record - under the title “Drama in the Age of Einstein.” His 1978 essay “Theatre in the Age of Einstein: The Crack in the Chimney” is an expansion of this article.

Although Robert Brustein is an important scholar and critic of theater and literature in America, he is neither well-known in Norway nor by some Norwegian Ibsen scholars in the United States. Before I begin an investigation into his contributions to Ibsen studies, I will present a short review of his major influences. Afterwards, I will place him in the context of the Norwegian/Scandinavian Ibsen tradition to show how he fits into the Norwegian scholarly tradition and yet has something new to contribute to it. My aim in this review is to provide an overview of Brustein’s major writings on Ibsen and to contextualize them with the major Norwegian Ibsen scholars A.H. Winsnes, Francis Bull, Halvdan Koht; Harald Beyer, Edvard Beyer, Daniel Haakonsen and Else Høst; Vigdis Ystad and Bjørn Hemmer; Frode Helland, and Atle Kittang. These are scholars whom Brustein himself does not engage (as opposed to Danish critic Georg Brandes who Brustein does discuss). There is not much material available by these scholars in English so my scope of their work is limited to what is available in translation.

“Ibsen and Revolt”, Brustein’s seminal essay, was first published in 1962. In the bibliography he mostly references translated works into English of the play texts and letters of

Ibsen by William Archer, Michael Meyer, James McFarlane, Fydel Edmund Garrett, J.N. Laurvik, M. Morison and Evert Sprinchorn. He quotes the critics Janko Lavrin, and George Bernard Shaw. He also acknowledges the Ibsen scholarship of Hermann Weigand, Francis Fergusson, and Eric Bentley, one of his lecturers at Columbia University.

Brustein only took one course with Bentley at Columbia and it wasn't related to Ibsen. Nonetheless, Bentley had a great impact on Brustein's understanding of Ibsen. Brustein, like all his peers in American drama criticism, was deeply influenced by Bentley's 1946 book *The Playwright as Thinker*. In a recent panel titled "The Critic as Thinker" which included both Brustein and Bentley, Brustein said that Bentley "really had a big impact on virtually everything I did." ("Critic as Thinker" Panel)

Bentley's chapter "Wagner and Ibsen: A Contrast" from *The Playwright as Thinker* has had an enormous influence on Brustein's understanding of Ibsen. It can be appreciated most profoundly in Brustein's 1978 lecture "The Fate of Ibsenism," which I will go into greater detail in my chapter on Brustein's production of *The Wild Duck*. Brustein's belief that poetry and a Viking spirit exist in even Ibsen's most prosaic plays stems from Bentley. "Ibsen pretends to write flat dialogue, but the opaque, uninviting sentences carry rich meaning... It is as rich in artifice as the verse of *Peer Gynt*. Its very naturalness is the final artifice, the art that conceals art." (Bentley 124-5)

In the archive of Brustein's private papers I came across notes and comments which Bentley had mailed Brustein when he was working on his essay *Ibsen and Revolt*. They are dated August 7th but do not include the year. The notes are the sort a writer seeks from a friend, teacher, or colleague as they are working on a draft of their work. Bentley served as all of those to Brustein. Bentley thinks Brustein is "on to something very good and substantial." (Letter to Brustein Aug. 1st 2.) Simultaneously he provided Brustein with constructive criticism, pushing him to think more deeply about his subject. "You seem to be of the Freudian generation and to have missed out on Marx—is that true? You seem much more sensitive to the psychological side of things. Do you know your socialism, anarchism, etc? Sometimes it wouldn't hurt. This is one very big side of your subject." (ibid)

Brustein does not make all the revisions Bentley suggests because there are differences in their respective understandings of Ibsen. Bentley is a Marxist. Where Brustein interprets a

somewhat positive heroic death at the end of *The Master Builder* and *When We Dead Awaken*, Bentley writes to Brustein:

Is *When We Dead Awaken* bound to be taken as you take it or could it be taken as an expression of dreariness like *Eyolf* (Eyolf as Weigand takes Eyolf). I mean: do they awake in any sense. Ibsen has a way of making us feel there might be something inspiring going on when just the reverse is actually the case (and the end of *Master Builder* and *Rosmer* are like this),—as a young man I was always fooled—only as one much more hurt by the world did I realize how utterly neurotic and negative these endings really are at least I think so. (ibid 1)

The editors of *Theatre of Revolt* felt Brustein was referencing Bentley too much. On December 31, 1963 the associate editor wrote him: “All of us noticed, by the way, an excessive and, we think, unnecessary reference to Eric Bentley. One editor said, ‘After all, what’s valuable in this book is what Robert Brustein, not Eric Bentley, says!’ In short, we do not think he is your peer, and what you’ve produced here is a real literary breakthrough.” (Emily Morison Beck, Letter to Brustein)

It should be noted that Bentley’s book *The Life of the Drama* was published at the same time as Brustein’s *Theatre of Revolt*. The fact that their books were seemingly in competition with one another did not stop the two from seeking each other’s counsel. Bentley even wrote Brustein a note congratulating him on the publication of the book. In his note he mentions that due to the fact that his own book had been published recently, he could not congratulate Brustein publicly (Bentley Letter to Brustein 1964).

In addition to affecting Brustein’s view of Ibsen and other writers, Bentley’s *The Playwright as Thinker* influenced the mission Brustein would set for the Yale School of Drama:

He [Bentley] speaks of the need for setting up theatres in colleges: ‘The college theatre should beware of totally excluding, on principle, anything but the current commodities of Broadway and the hopeful efforts of our friend who has written a play.’ He gives four different things that he thinks colleges or universities should do. They should attend themselves to the classics—the great classics of the past. They should deal with new plays as much as possible. They should deal with modern classics, and they should deal with the forgotten play. I didn’t know I was doing that, but when I went to Yale and I started the Yale Repertory Theatre, we really started a theatre that was built on the principles that Eric had enunciated in this book. I’ve been trying to do it ever since, up until five years ago, when I retired from running the American Repertory Theatre. (“The Critic as Thinker”)

Though Brustein was greatly influenced by Bentley, as mentioned earlier, he did not study Ibsen with him at Columbia. Brustein's professor for the course "Modern Drama (from Ibsen to the present, with emphasis on American drama)" was Joseph Wood Krutch, a noted drama critic of the time. In the Brustein papers I came across his notebook from Krutch's course. Brustein's focus on Ibsen's extreme individualism in "Ibsen and Revolt" and his belief that Ibsen's art transcends any political movement can be linked to notes from Krutch's course. He writes, "People, after success, always trying to draw him into movements, but he never allowed himself to be drawn in. Plays more than aesthetic concerns and more than preachments – that is why he lived. The pamphlet doesn't last long. The drama does." (Brustein, *Krutch notes*)

Krutch's view can explain why Brustein in *Theatre of Revolt* does not admire *A Dolls House*. Krutch called it polemical, "principally a pamphlet." (ibid). Brustein's views on the play only changed after watching Claire Bloom's performance of Nora at the Criterion in London in 1973. He ends his review writing "I am grateful to this production for increasing my respect for this play." (*The Culture Watch* 81) This is an important example of Brustein's theoretical understanding of Ibsen being influenced by performance.

Brustein's problems with Arthur Miller may have also been influenced by his teacher. Krutch wrote an essay titled "Arthur Miller bowdlerizes Ibsen". But where Krutch, like Miller, focused on the "well-made play" aspects of Ibsen's middle plays, Brustein is more influenced by Bentley's poetic interpretation. It is also worth noting that plays such as *The Master Builder* and *When We Dead Awaken* do not even appear in Brustein's notes from the course. These two plays are quite central in Brustein's interpretation of Ibsen but Krutch did not discuss them in the course. In Brustein's class notes the discussion goes from *Lady from the Sea* to *Hedda Gabler* to *John Gabriel Borkman* to a discussion of Strindberg without dealing with the other plays.

In other places Brustein has acknowledged a debt to his teacher Lionel Trilling, whom he considers his intellectual father. This influence of Trilling is explored in Scott E. Walters's doctoral dissertation "Completing the Circle: Lionel Trilling's Influence on the Criticism of Robert Brustein". In it Walters not only explores Trilling's influence on Brustein but also Brustein's effect on Trilling. Trilling disliked the dramatic form. He felt theater was less legitimate than literature. Walters explores Brustein's influence on adjusting Trilling's view.

Trilling includes references to *Ghosts* in his short story “Of This Time, Of That Place”, and he wrote a preface to *The Wild Duck* which he included in the anthology he edited, *The Experience of Literature: A Reader with Commentaries*. Trilling published his book in 1967, three years after Brustein’s *The Theatre of Revolt* was published. Walters argues that Brustein influenced the inclusion of six plays in the anthology: “Trilling ultimately recognized the need to include drama in the story of literary modernism.” (Walters 115) Five of the six modern playwrights whose work Trilling included in his anthology had been playwrights Brustein had selected for *The Theatre of Revolt*. Nonetheless, Trilling was “unwilling to accept Brustein’s enthusiastic and single-minded championing of revolt.” (ibid) Tellingly, Walters points out that the Ibsen play Trilling chose to include, *The Wild Duck*, is the one in which “Ibsen completely denies the validity of revolt.” (Brustein, *Revolt* 73)

Brustein does not discuss either of Trilling’s Ibsen related essays in his writing, and in my interview with him he did not specifically recall them. But Trilling had an enormous influence on Brustein as a critic. He dedicated his 1975 collection *The Culture Watch* to Trilling. “The essays reflected my continuing effort to treat dramatic literature as a human and intellectual expression, an approach I had learned at the feet of my revered teacher and intellectual father.” (*Dumbocracy in America* 260) Brustein confirmed for me in our interview that the mentors discussed above had in fact influenced his understanding of Ibsen.

In addition to Walters’s dissertation on Brustein, the other study of his work which I have found is Alberta Lintecume’s 1982 Masters project “An Analysis of the Dramatic Criticism of Robert Brustein As Published in the New Republic, 1959-1968”. It is a statistical analysis of elements of Brustein’s criticism. Although the main part of her thesis is not relevant to my study, her introduction and conclusion are important. Her research showed that “To date, there has been no evaluation of the dramatic criticism of Robert Brustein, one of the most influential contemporary American critics.” (Lintecume 1) In her concluding recommendations she wrote, “It would be valuable to know if his scholarly opinions had a practical application when he established the Yale Repertory Theatre, one of the country’s most creative and enterprising resident theaters.” (ibid 26) She goes on to suggest the question of Brustein’s influence on the artists he worked with and the students he taught regarding “what a theater should be? A future

study could determine whether the elements Brustein considered most important were considered important by these people.” (ibid)

The only published book study of Brustein is Marilyn Plotkins’s *The American Repertory Theatre Reference Book: The Brustein Years*. It provides a useful overview of Brustein’s years after he left Yale for Harvard, where he founded The American Repertory (ART) and later its Harvard-affiliated Institute for Advanced Theatre Training. The book provides detailed data about each production at ART including cast lists, dates performed, a short commentary and an overview of the critical response.

Two works which are important to appreciating the American landscape of Ibsen production are *Ibsen in America: a century of change* by Robert A. Schanke, and Donald E. Jukes’s doctoral dissertation “The American Ibsen Theater: Rising and Falling in the Master’s Shadow”. Schanke’s book is a useful survey of Ibsen productions and Ibsen’s reception in the United States. It confirms that though Ibsen’s plays had been produced often in the United States, they had always been done in a straightforward naturalistic manner, with the emphasis often on the actresses in the lead roles. This is in contrast to the experimentation with Ibsen’s plays discussed by the Markers, which occurred in Europe first in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and then again from the 1960s onwards with Bergman, Zadek, Stein, and others.

Schanke does reference Brustein’s *The Theatre of Revolt* in his selected bibliography and also states that his keynote address “set the tone” (Schanke 157) at the Ibsen Sesquicentennial Symposium. It was at the symposium that the Ibsen Society of America was founded and out of which the American Ibsen Theater emerged several years later. But besides for his reference to Brustein, Schanke neglects both Brustein and his theaters’ work on Ibsen in his analysis. His discussion of recent productions of Ibsen’s plays focuses mainly on productions in New York, whereas Brustein was working in New Haven, Connecticut and Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Jukes’s dissertation focuses specifically on the work of The American Ibsen Theater and therefore does not discuss YRT or ART’s productions. References to Brustein focus on a discussion between the artistic directors of the theater and Rolf Fjelde regarding whether to have Brustein listed on their letterhead as an artistic advisor. Fjelde was against it, because he wanted the theater to be seen as something radically new and not affiliated with the establishment. But

“by the time the 1984 stationery was printed, Fjelde must have relented or agreed with Davis that these names ‘flushed out the letterhead’ and had little relationship to the operation or perception of the theater. Robert Brustein was among the new names which were also included.” (Jukes 157-8) But fundamentally, what his work provides is an analysis of one theater’s aim to build upon the new approach to Ibsen that Brustein had advocated in his writing and at his own theater.

The one article which I found which does discuss Brustein’s influence on contemporary theater directors’ approach to Ibsen was an interview Joan Templeton conducted with Ivan Talijancic, a young director who had directed acclaimed experimental productions of *A Dolls House* and a site-specific installation version of *The Lady from the Sea*. He had been inspired by Brustein’s introduction to his adaptation of *When We Dead Awaken*, “where Brustein says that Ibsen was not the realist everybody supposed, but a poet. [This inspired Talijancic to create] a very symbolic production - expressionistic, I guess - but I kept most of the text.” (Templeton, *Talijancic* 4-5)

BRUSTEIN AND THE NORWEGIAN TRADITION

Brustein’s theoretical approach to Ibsen in “Ibsen and Revolt” is multifaceted and influenced by a variety of perspectives. Many of these perspectives are in line with elements of the Norwegian Ibsen tradition. Daniel Haakonsen briefly lays out the basic trends in Ibsen scholarship. His analysis is enlightening and useful in framing where Brustein and his Norwegian cohorts were positioned ideologically by the early 1970s.

The first phase [of Ibsen scholarship] was initiated by Georg Brandes and was continued by critics and scholars right up until the appearance of Halvdan Koht’s great biography. During this period interest was centered on Ibsen the iconoclast, the man who laid bare bourgeois society and its morals. (Haakonsen)

Like Koht, who places Ibsen among the “poets of revolt” (Koht 353) and A.H. Winsnes – “Few poets have delved deeper into the problem of freedom than Ibsen. He casts light into all corners, social, psychological, moral, religious, metaphysical.” (Winsnes 138) – Brustein’s Ibsen is the extreme individualist poet, who initiates the revolt of modern drama. Unlike Shaw, Brustein does not hail Ibsen’s revolt for its social aspects – rather, he writes, “We shall not confront another modern dramatist whose revolutionary integrity remains quite so pure.” (*Revolt*

39) Even in his middle period (social-realistic plays) Ibsen's revolt is poetic rather than reformist or propagandist. "Even his specifically polemical activities are subordinate to a larger purpose which changes little throughout his dramatic career." (ibid 40) As he said of himself, "I have been a poet and less a social philosopher than is commonly believed." (ibid) According to Brustein, "he was always more a Romantic poet than a prose realist who never quite managed to suppress his aspiration towards the sublime." (ibid 43) Ibsen's revolt is a total revolt. His "deepest quarrel is probably less with the pillars of society, state, church that dominate his plays than the supreme authority figure, God himself." (ibid 40)

Haakonsen continues his discussion of the development of Ibsen scholarship. "But even while these concerns dominated, discoveries were being made in other areas e.g. symbolism, indicating another approach to Ibsen." (Haakonsen) In addition to Koht and Winsnes, Francis Bull also explored Ibsen's use of symbolism which Brustein later advocated and explored both in his theory and his productions.

Some critics have reproached Ibsen for what they call the closed rooms of his 'realistic' theatre. I believe this to be a total misunderstanding of his dramatic art. In most of his plays the rooms are not 'closed'—on the contrary: look and listen and you will discover that Nature, symbolically or directly very often takes a great part in what happens. It is evident to everybody that in Ibsen's two great dramatic poems *Brand* and *Peer Gynt*, the nature background is quite essential; but how is it in the modern dramas? In *Ghosts*, the dialogue in the first act has for accompaniment the rain and mist of western Norway—no sharp outlines are visible in the landscape. But in the dark night there comes a sudden change, with light and shadows from the fire in the asylum near by, and at last the sun rises, and then the snowy mountains in the background appear in cold clarity. (Bull 46).

Haakonsen continues his overview of Norwegian scholarship by speaking of his own generation of scholars. "And at about the middle of this century Ibsen scholarship entered upon a new phase in which interest in the symbolism of his plays played a decisive part." Bjørn Hemmer describes the aim of Haakonsen's 1957 *Henrik Ibsens realisme* as "liberating the writer, the artist, Ibsen from the realistic straight-jacket in which many critics had placed him...on a deeper level than the social one." (Hemmer 13) At approximately the same time that Haakonsen is releasing Ibsen from the realistic straitjacket in Norway, Brustein is attempting the same thing in the United States. This generation of Norwegian Ibsen scholars which includes Haakonsen, Harald Beyer,

Edvard Beyer, and Else Høst were deeply impacted by John Northam's book *Ibsen's Dramatic Method*.

Though Brustein never refers to the book, his 1961 review of a production of *Ghosts* – “On Finding a Cure for Syphilis” – has elements similar to Northam. Brustein critiques the staging:

The symbolic garden, for example, associated with the sensuality and fertility of Regina and her mother, has been reduced to a few floral decorations on the side of the stage; and we have, therefore, lost our view, through the conservatory windows, of the fjord, so essential as a contrasting image of the wild, natural life outside...Mr. Ross has chosen to ignore Ibsen's careful instructions about the lighting: why the stage is flooded with brightness when the author insists on gloom and drizzle, and why Mrs. Alving has been separated from her symbolic 'enlightening' lamp. (*Discontent* 59)

Ibsen's stage directions are important to understanding the plays. Unlike Northam and the Norwegian school led by Haakonsen, Brustein only criticizes a staging which veers from the stage directions when the poor directorial choices detract from the production, Ibsen's reputation, and the plays' chances of being staged again in the near future.

Though Brustein felt the production suffered by ignoring the stage directions and their symbolism, as a man of the theater he understood the practical considerations as well. “Some of the difficulties, admittedly, can be attributed less to Mr. Ross than to Mr. Ross's theatre: to stage *Ghosts* in the three-quarters is to sacrifice three-quarters of its illustrative power.” (ibid) Members of the Norwegian school of Ibsen who were devout to Northam and Haakonsen would be less tolerant of a director's veering from the stage direction for any reason. Edvard Beyer, in contrast, presents a middle path in his 1972 article, where he is at once exasperated with directors ignoring *Ibsen's Dramatic Method* and wanting “a free hand, even in regard to the dialogue—let alone stage directions describing drawing rooms of the Victorian age!” (Beyer 49) while understanding that “I do not think there is any reason to demand that Ibsen should for ever be played in realistic settings and costumes at all.” (ibid) Brustein would have a chance to apply his own views on *Ghosts* when he would stage the play at ART in 1982.

There was also a debate regarding whether to interpret Ibsen's plays as ironic or idealistic.

"The playwright's idealism was also emphasized during this period, just as much as his criticism of society and his removing the masks of moral rectitude worn by members of society. But in the past few (late '60s, early '70s) years the pendulum has swung back again. In the Nordic countries at any rate, there has been a steadily increasing tendency to regard all of Ibsen's idealism as ironic, at least whenever expressed by his main characters. Ibsen, we are told again, was primarily concerned with exposure of falsehood and critical comment."
(Haakonsen)

Beyer explains that:

Critics like Haakonsen and Høst, defending the rank of Ibsen's plays as full-fledged tragedies, have emphasized the tragic status and dignity of his main characters...Other critics however have been very suspicious of Ibsen's idealistic characters...A Norwegian critic, Arild Haaland, believes that they are all condemned by the poet, whereas Aage Henriksen, a Danish professor of literature, claims that Ibsen portrayed his characters in an ambiguous or ironical way."
(Beyer 48)

In the next generation of Norwegian Ibsen scholars, Jørgen Haugan follows in Henriksen's tradition while Vigdis Ystad and Hemmer follow in Haakonsen's path. Toril Moi names the Ibsen scholars Atle Kittang and Frode Helland as the representatives of the ideology of modernism.

For Brustein, Ibsen's works, when read as a whole, create a Hegelian dialectic with one another and within themselves. As to the question of the idealist, from absolute and ironic perspectives, ultimately Ibsen cannot be pinned down to one perspective. Brustein's interpretation of Ibsen's characters, however, weighs on the side of an absolute idealist perspective. There is a Romantic-Messianic strain to his interpretation of many of Ibsen's heroes and he often links the protagonist to the image of Ibsen himself. For Brustein, the basic Ibsenist conflict and revolt is frequently messianic – its hero a rebel against God, and its mission not superficial changes to the social structure, but a complete alteration in the moral nature of man. A new Creation is represented by the body of his art, e.g. *Brand*; *Emperor and Galilean*; *Master Builder* *Solness*.

In contrast to Brustein's interpretation of Ibsen's messianism, is Winsnes's analysis:

“Ibsen was not a Christian. But his conception of life is unthinkable without the heritage of Christian ethical and religious ideas. Thanks to his heritage he became—in spite of Georg Brandes’ saying—a more reliable guardian of the human personality and the spirit of freedom than Nietzsche. I regard Ibsen’s intimate connection with the Christian humanistic tradition as essential to a proper understanding of his significance today.” (Winsnes 143)

Though both scholars use religious language in discussing Ibsen’s work, Brustein would disagree with Winsnes’s attribution of a Christian conception of life to Ibsen. It is fundamentally this tradition that, according to Brustein’s view, Ibsen is overthrowing in his call to “torpedo the ark”. As Brustein points out in his controversial essay “Theatre of Guilt”, “Hilda Wangel exhorts Solness to develop a ‘Viking spirit,’ to free himself from a sickly conscience by rising above traditional Christian concepts of good and evil, right and wrong.” (*Dumbocracy* 11)

In “The Theatre of Guilt”, the opening essay to Brustein’s 1994 book *Dumbocracy in America: Studies in the Theatre of Guilt, 1987-1994*, which first appeared in a 1992 issue of *American Theatre* magazine and was republished in the 1994 edition of New Theatre Quarterly 40, edited by Jan Kott and Eugenio Barba, he explores the issue and problem of guilt in American drama. But unlike Atle Kittang, who employs psychological analysis to Ibsen’s characters, Brustein takes a less psychoanalytic approach in his interpretation of the characters and the plays. He is more interested in the Greek Oedipal archetype of the character than their oedipal complex.

Brustein does however focus heavily on Ibsen’s personal biography, his correspondences, and perhaps his psychology as well. In addressing the problems in modern American drama, he returns to themes he established in “Theatre in the Age of Einstein: The Crack in the Chimney”.

Despite the presence of a sophisticated judicial system in modern times... Western realist drama has continued to center on guilt, expiation, and punishment through the intervention of a central dramatic character. The classic play in this genre, and presumed model for so many later works of its kind, is Ibsen’s *Ghosts*... Note, however, that in Ibsen, as in Sophocles, the same person plays the role of investigator and malefactor... The fundamental sin both of Oedipus and Mrs. Alving is... ignorance. The play may be a thing to catch the conscience of a suspect, but the conscience belongs to the questioning protagonist. (ibid)

Brustein attacks Arthur Miller here, as he did in “Theatre in the Age of Einstein: The Crack in the Chimney” by showing that Miller misunderstood this basic element of Ibsen’s work: “Rather

than being about liberation through self-discovery, as in the mature Ibsen—[Miller's plays] center on guilt and expiation, following a climactic confrontation that leads to catastrophe.” (ibid 12)

Brustein continued:

This pattern [of self-discovery] conforms to Yeats's definition of poetry as proceeding from our quarrel with ourselves — as opposed to rhetoric which proceeds from our quarrel with others. Many of Ibsen's plays, particularly his doctrinaire early prose dramas, are more rhetorical than poetical in both their language and in their indictments of the social world and the pompous Philistines who run it. But if Ibsen claimed to be 'more a poet and less a social philosopher than is commonly believed,' this conviction was based on the belief, as he wrote in another context and realized in his best plays, that 'to write poetry means to pass judgment on oneself.' In short, the artist was not in a position to chastise others before exploring the darkness in his own soul. (ibid)

In contrast to Kittang's approach, which analyzes the characters' psyches, Brustein concentrates on the *playwright's* psyche.

What was particularly controversial in *Theatre of Guilt* is that in addition to Miller, Brustein attacked the leading African-American playwright August Wilson for writing in the same vein. It was a critique of August Wilson which Brustein had begun already a few years earlier in his revision of “Theatre in the Age of Einstein: The Crack in the Chimney”, which he re-named “Reimagining the Drama”. The essays were extremely controversial because they touched upon the issue of race and political correctness in America. They culminated in a debate in New York between August Wilson and Robert Brustein which was covered by the national press. It was one of the few moments in recent memory in which theater became part of the greater national dialogue.

As he began developing in his 1978 article “Theatre in the Age of Einstein: The Crack in the Chimney”, Brustein writes,

The determination of guilt and its expiation may still constitute the moral quest of his characters, but Ibsen obviously believes that the sources of this guilt are not easily accessible to the inquiring mind... Ibsen, in short, is attempting to repeal the simple, fundamental law of cause and effect, which had been an unquestioned statute at least since the Enlightenment—the law that ruled the linear, logical,

rationalistic world of literature and, in particular, the Western literature of guilt. In its place, he is reconfirming the unknowable, ineffable secrets underlying the will of Nature...Ibsen's proposals are revolutionary. They challenge not only conventional theatre but established religion, established psychology, established social theory as well. Nevertheless, these proposals are actually a return to the assumptions of an earlier age of mystery, which held sway before the advent of Newtonian physics, Cartesian logic and behavioral psychology. The drama of the Greeks and Elizabethans, for example, is rarely causal in our modern sense. (*Critical Moments* 108-110)

By upending the assumption of causality in Ibsen's plays, Brustein takes his modernist aesthetic and opens the door for a new interpretation of Ibsen's work. Brustein's approach is innovative. I have not found Norwegian scholars whose interpretation correlates to his. Nonetheless, Brustein's approach does fit as an extension to these scholars' poetic/symbolist view of Ibsen's plays. Frode Helland references Brustein's contribution in his book *Melankoliens spill. En studie i Henrik Ibsens siste dramaer*. (Helland 125) Brustein's interpretation has influenced North American scholars such as Errol Durbach and William W. Demastes, both of whom explore "the unreliability of empiricism and rationalism in Ibsen's plays." (Reinert 17) Demastes has written several books and articles about American theater, including the article "Re-inspecting the Crack in the Chimney: Chaos Theory from Ibsen to Stoppard" which, as the title implies, builds upon Brustein's contribution. Durbach's article "Ibsen and the Dramaturgy of Uncertainty" also is greatly indebted to Brustein, though he does not reference him in his work.

THEORY, METHOD AND SOURCES

Contemporary productions of Ibsen's plays are important to scholarship. That said, theater is not created in a vacuum. It is, among other things, influenced by and based on scholars' theories. In the case of Ibsen scholarship, performance might be a way to see if a theory on Ibsen holds water when it is put to the test in the laboratory of the theater process. Robert Brustein has stated: "You cannot have an audience until you have a community and you will not have a community until you have a culture." (Flannery 92) You cannot have an Ibsen theatre without an Ibsen audience and you cannot have an Ibsen audience until you have an Ibsen community and you will not have an Ibsen community until you have an Ibsen culture. To develop an Ibsen culture, you have to present and discuss Ibsen in articles.

In this way, Brustein's pursuit and advocacy of Ibsen through both his writing and his productions are part of the same activity. The aim is to develop an Ibsen culture and interpretation of Ibsen in an American context, which serves to counter Arthur Miller's misappropriation of Ibsenism in what Brustein terms the "Theater of Guilt." Rick Davis, artistic director of the American Ibsen Theater, cited Brustein's important contribution to the shift in approach for both the theory and staging of Ibsen in America.

Among the various scholarly approaches to Ibsen discussed in Errol Durbach's article "A Century of Ibsen Criticism" is the staging of Ibsen as a form of criticism. Frederick J. and Lise-Lone Marker's *Ibsen's Lively Art* is an example of that approach. They discuss how the deeper meanings of Ibsen's work which scholars have explored "manifests itself in Ibsen's theatrical syntax." (Marker x)

In their book the Markers explain the methodology for their study:

A study whose methodology is consistently reconstructive is quite obviously dependent for its success upon the gathering of the objective factual evidence that constitutes the basis for all theater research – annotated texts, promptbooks, rehearsal records, set and costume designs, photographs, reviews, and whatever else has not already perished. (Marker xi)

In researching and developing this thesis I read everything Brustein has published about Ibsen from his major essays and reviews about specific productions, as well as passing references in discussions on culture, politics, and other works. I have also read through the critical reviews of Brustein's books found in newspapers and journals at the time of their publication, though I did not find any particularly new insights on Brustein's understanding of Ibsen in the reviews.

This thesis will focus on the production of each play, both the staging and the collaborative process for each production. With the exception of Thomas Haas's production of *When We Dead Awaken*, in which the critical reception influenced Brustein's theoretical approach to Ibsen, I will mainly use the reviews of each production as a source to describe the production, rather than to gauge its success or failure in the eyes of a specific critic. Brustein, a critic himself, has spoken out against the loved it-hated it approach to criticism as being useless

to both artist and audience in his article “Himalaya Criticism”. In general, the productions received various levels of acclaim – from raves to pans – but no production was unanimously disparaged by critics or audiences.

In his book *Letters to a Young Actor* Brustein discusses the fleeting nature of theater. All that is left after a production is done are the penciled scripts, photographs, programs, reviews, and at times video footage. (*Letters* 208) He appropriately titled the chapter “Ephemeris, Ephemeris” because all that is left is the production ephemera. It was specifically that material that I use to write my thesis, in conjunction with Brustein, the Markers’ theory and Plotkins’ book.

I went through Brustein’s unpublished collected papers at Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center at Boston University’s Contemporary Collections, which houses the Robert Brustein collection. Assistant Director for Manuscripts Ryan Hendrickson was my archivist. There I found Brustein’s notebooks from his days as a student, including the previously mentioned notes from the course “Modern Drama (from Ibsen to the present, with emphasis on American drama)” by Joseph Wood Krutch. The collection also contains relevant correspondences with his editors as he was working on *The Theatre of Revolt*, as well as critical comments Eric Bentley sent him as he was working on the Ibsen section of that book. The collection also contained draft manuscripts of some of his major Ibsen essays which provided insight into his thought process, as well as a review of Bergman’s production of *The Wild Duck* that I refer to in my section on his 1978 production of *The Wild Duck* which he had written when he was on sabbatical in England. Though it was published in the *New Republic*, it was not included in his published collections of reviews. It is an important review because it provides insight into the development of Brustein’s understanding of causality in Ibsen’s work.

The Gotlieb Archive also had reviews from Brustein’s ART production of *Ghosts* which I could not find elsewhere, as well as the actual set model for that production. I also found the unpublished manuscripts of the adaptations for the 1971 YRT production of *When We Dead Awaken* by Michael Feingold, *Ghosts* by Robert Brustein and *The Master Builder* by Brustein. In addition to the manuscript for *The Master Builder* I found Kate Whoriskey’s correspondence with Brustein regarding his adaptation, her approach to the material, and many design sketches

and photo references. These were particularly useful in preparing to interview Kate Whoriskey and in writing that section of this thesis.

On a larger level, it was very useful to sit and read Brustein's letters, ranging from personal correspondences with friends and family to professional correspondences, including the minutes from board meetings at ART, which provided great insight into his personality and how he led two of the most important regional theaters and conservatories in the United States. Amongst his letters I also found his correspondence with the Center for Ibsen Studies regarding an invitation extended to him to speak at one of the International Ibsen Conferences.

In addition to the Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center I also went to the Harvard Theater Collection. Reader Services Librarian Betty Falsey and Fredric Woodbridge Wilson, the curator, assisted me. There I watched and took notes on the archival videos of *Hedda Gabler* as I followed along with the stage manager's prompt book from that production. In addition, I took notes on the prompt books for all the ART productions, and perused the stage managers' rehearsal and performance reports for each production, as well as the speech and voice coaches' notes for each show. The video for *The Master Builder* has been lost or misplaced so I was unable to watch it. At the Harvard Theater Collection I also went through production ephemera such as programs for each production at ART, which I photocopied, as well as relevant issues of *ART News*, a newsletter sent to subscribers of the theater, which had articles pertaining to the productions.

At ART's in-house archive, Director of Press and Public Relations Katalin Mitchell assisted me in finding press materials, reviews, and production photos and slides for each of their Ibsen productions, as well as production photos from Slobodan Unkovski's acclaimed production of *Peer Gynt* with Institute students and Mary Sutton, a directing student at the Institute's senior production of *Little Eyolf*.

At Yale School of Drama, librarian Pam Jordan assisted me in finding production programs, reviews, and photos for *When We Dead Awaken* and *The Wild Duck*, as well as a penciled production script and Michael Bertin's unpublished dramaturg's log for *The Wild Duck*. I read through and photocopied all the materials. In addition, Ms. Jordan searched through the archive to see if there was material on student-directed productions of Ibsen's plays during Brustein's tenure, but none could be found.

In New York, my primary research source was The Billy Rose Theatre Collection at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center. There I found many old article clippings about Brustein, from the beginning of his tenure as dean at Yale School of Drama until the present. In addition I found production ephemera and reviews of his books from *Theatre of Revolt* onwards. I took notes and photocopied all relevant articles. At the Library I also watched the archival videos of Wilson's *When We Dead Awaken* and Rochaix's *The Wild Duck* and took notes as I read along with the published script.

All this research prepared me to conduct a series of interviews. I was asking the subjects about details of events that occurred decades ago, so I made sure to email them before the interview with a bit of background about my thesis and what I was hoping to ask them. I did in-person interviews with Michael Posnick, a student of Brustein's from his early days at Yale who saw Haas's production of *When We Dead Awaken* and had studied with him. I met with *The Master Builder* director Kate Whoriskey and discussed not only her production, but also her time studying at the Institute for Advanced Theatre Training to see how it evolved since its early days. I brought with me her notes to Brustein, as well as the production sketches, to jar her memory.

Lastly, I met with Robert Brustein at ART in Cambridge and conducted an interview with him. To prepare him for the interview, I sent him an email which gave him a sense of what research I had already done and what questions I was interested in asking him. He emailed back that he looked forward to meeting with me, but that I probably knew more about the subject than him at this point. That prepared me to provide him background information before each question to jar his memory, as well as to set my expectations for the type of information I would seek from him. Prior to meeting with Brustein, I contacted Todd London, the artistic director of New Dramatists where I once worked. Todd is a friend of Brustein's and prepared me for interviewing him.

I conducted phone interviews with Mary Sutton, Brustein's student from the early days of the Institute for Advanced Theatre Training's directing program who directed *Little Eyolf* there and had seen Unkovski's *Peer Gynt*. I also talked to Bart DeLorenzo, another directing student from the early days of the program, who directed a production of *Hedda Gabler*; and Nicolette

Vajtay, an acting student from the same time at the Institute who played Hedda and was in *Peer Gynt*.

In each case I started with a general line of questions regarding the subject's background and time studying at Yale School of Drama or the Institute for Advanced Theatre Training, and then went into the particulars of the Ibsen productions they were involved in and Brustein's influence on them.

All interviews were recorded with a digital recorder and I took notes throughout the interviews. I have completely transcribed several of the interviews, while only transcribing parts of others. I have digital files of all interviews though the sound quality varies.

I corresponded via e-mail with Anne E. Kokkinn, an actress who played Hedvig in François Rochaix's 1986 National Theater in Oslo's production. She provided insight into his approach for that production so I could contrast it with his work at ART. I was in touch with Donald Jukes who provided me with a copy of his dissertation, as well as some information regarding the link between The American Ibsen Theater and Brustein. I recently was in touch with the company's artistic director Rick Davis, who confirmed Brustein's influence on their work. I contacted Ben Cameron, who had worked with director Thomas Haas in the 1980s, and he provided a few memories of the director. I was also in touch with Ryan West, a recent graduate from the acting program at the Institute, to find out how the program there has changed in recent years.

I attempted to contact several other people relevant to the productions discussed in my thesis; however I did not receive replies to my emails. They include Michael Feingold, Brustein's student and the dramaturg and translator of *When We Dead Awaken* for the 1971 production, and Adrian Hall, director of *Hedda Gabler*. François Rochaix, director of the 1996 *The Wild Duck*, replied to my initial e-mail but did not follow up with the requested information.

In preparation for the literature review, in addition to the above reading I also searched through electronic dissertation searches for material related to Brustein. In addition, I read materials in English about and by the major Norwegian Ibsen scholars, so that I could place Brustein within that tradition.

Part 2
When We Dead Awaken – YRT 1971:
Experiment #1: Applying Brustein's Theory to Performance

Frederick J. and Lise-Lone Marker's *Ibsen's Lively Art* studies *Peer Gynt*, *A Dolls House*, *Ghosts*, *The Wild Duck*, *Hedda Gabler*, and *John Gabriel Borkman*. Five of the six plays are prominent and widely produced around the world. The Markers ignore *When We Dead Awaken*. The play occupies a central role in Robert Brustein's conception of Ibsen as a poetic playwright rather than a prose realist. He produced *When We Dead Awaken* twice, but the Markers do not discuss the play's significance in their study.

When We Dead Awaken was an early keystone to Brustein's interpretation of Ibsen. In *The Theatre of Revolt* he had written

When we cease regarding Ibsen purely as a prose realist, we will be able to see that *When We Dead Awaken* is not so much a new departure as a continuation and intensification of all his old themes, in which his mysticism, no longer concealed under authenticated surfaces, has become more rampant and overt. (*Revolt* 79)

He considers the play an expression of Ibsen's poetic vision. *When We Dead Awaken* "suggests that, had he lived, Ibsen might have developed in the same direction as Strindberg or Maeterlinck, creating a drama of the soul to which the physical events of everyday life have been completely subordinated." (ibid)

In *The Theatre of Revolt*, Brustein argues that Ibsen was first and foremost a dramatic poet. His epic masterpieces *Brand* and *Peer Gynt* are the true expressions of Ibsen's genius. In Brustein's analysis, Ibsen's experimentations with the realistic prose drama were a great sacrifice on the playwright's part. His decision to experiment with prose realism was part of his truth seeking revolt. But his reasons for choosing the form were unconventional. He chose it "not because it afforded the dramatist an opportunity to document the surface of life, but because it permitted him to penetrate that surface to the hidden truth beneath." (ibid 66) Brustein at once acknowledges Ibsen's permanent shift in technique while undermining the conventional appreciation of it.

When We Dead Awaken, then, is the culmination of Ibsen's gradual return to his revitalized true self in both its symbolist form and its content. Brustein interprets Rubek's compromised masterpiece "Resurrection Day" as an expression of Ibsen's repudiation of the

realistic form. When Rubek, whom Brustein construes as a stand-in for Ibsen, changes the initial sculpture of Irene to include contemporary figures who have an “externally respectable appearance, but are really ‘pompous horse-faces, and self opinionated donkey muzzles’ ...those ‘dear domestic animals’ suggest what Ibsen thinks of the characters in his realistic plays (not to mention the public that attends them.)” (ibid 81-2)

Brustein’s choice of *When We Dead Awaken* as YRT’s first exploration of Ibsen onstage expressed where his interests in Ibsen lay. He was not producing the Ibsen plays which most influenced Arthur Miller. Rather, Brustein’s choice reflected to a great extent the works he discussed and admired in *The Theatre of Revolt*. His lack of admiration for *A Dolls House* in his theory is made manifest in that Ibsen’s most produced play was never produced at YRT or ART under Brustein’s directorship. Brustein had hoped to produce *When We Dead Awaken* as part of YRT’s fifth season, but it was ultimately chosen to open the company’s sixth season, its first season in rotating repertory.

Thomas B. Haas’s production was the first attempt to apply Robert Brustein’s theory to a stage production. Brustein’s own appraisal of the production changed through the years. His shifting opinion on Haas’s production maps the development of his own theory. As an analysis of this production will show, this experience would later influence both Brustein’s theory and his approach to staging Ibsen.

In a private correspondence to Philip Cates on November 4, 1971 while the production was running, Brustein wrote, “We’re working hard here and the repertory is off to a good start. Both *The Big House* and *When We Dead Awaken* are proving to be quite successful and *Caligula* joins the repertory on Thanksgiving.” (Letter to Philip Cates 11/4/71) The production had received overall a positive to mixed reception, with some critics hailing it as a “landmark” and “superb,” as well as a noticeable snub by *The New York Times* which Brustein blamed on politics. But his note to Philip Cates conveys that at the time of the premiere, Brustein was satisfied with how Haas’s production had successfully applied some of his interpretations to the staging. Brustein also used his theory, which I will discuss further, in marketing the play. It was advertised as “Ibsen’s controversial last play – an elegy for lost love and waning powers with all the ambiguous mystery of a late Beethoven quartet.” (YRT Season Brochure, Spring 1971).

His initial opinion of the production is in stark contrast to his assessment of the production in his memoir *Making Scenes: A Personal History of the Turbulent Years at Yale 1966-1979*. Reflecting on Haas's productions a decade later, he is far more critical:

Possibly because we were still working out the kinks in the [repertory] system, neither production [*The Big House* and *When We Dead Awaken*] was particularly distinguished. In *When We Dead Awaken*, Haas decided to use a live string quartet to provide the bridge music, background accompaniment, and sound effects; it also substituted for the noise of the avalanche in the end. It was a nice idea in theory, but in practice the music made the proceedings seem more torpid than tempestuous; the dead never managed to waken. Rubek and Irene should go out in thunder; instead, they went out to the accompaniment of two violins, a viola, and a cello sawing away on the upper stage at Beethoven's Fifteenth Quartet. Visually, the avalanche was represented by dropping a huge white sheet over the two central characters. It floated wistfully down to the concluding strains of the music while Norma [Brustein's wife] muttered something in my ear about a *schmatta* (Yiddish for cheap rag.) (*Scenes* 137)

A decade later, in 1992, he offers an even more pointed critique of the production. In an interview with scholar Elinor Fuchs, conducted during the Ibsen Society of America's "An Evening with Robert Brustein," Brustein took the blame for what he now calls the "failure" (ISA 5). His reasoning for the production's failure is that director Tom Haas "had read my chapter [in *Theater of Revolt*] too carefully." (ibid)

Brustein goes further. Though he takes responsibility for being the theoretical source for Haas's staging, he further distances himself from the production by claiming that he was out of the country on sabbatical in England that year and did not produce it, but was visiting New Haven at that time and saw the production. In actuality, Brustein was in England the subsequent year. He was at Yale for *When We Dead Awaken* and had directed *The Big House* by Lonnie Carter, which played in repertory with it. Brustein explained to me in my interview with him that during the conversation with Elinor Fuchs he had a "senior moment" and had forgotten the details of events which occurred twenty years prior. He said he had not intentionally distanced himself from the production. (Interview) Nonetheless, his forgetfulness in 1992 does underscore the unease he had with that production. What led to his revised assessment of YRT's *When We Dead Awaken*?

In order to address that question, I must first provide an analysis of the production and the ways in which Haas had applied Brustein's theory in his staging. As a first experiment in a lab, testing a hypothesis, Haas's *When We Dead Awaken* was quite illuminating. Even critic

Martin Gottfried, who attested in his review to disliking Ibsen's play, described the production as "superb." (Gottfried) Though I hesitate to discuss critical opinion because each reviewer interprets the event very differently, what can be gleaned from the reviews is that overall the production was far from the "failure" Brustein recollects years later.

My analysis of how Haas manifested Brustein's theory on stage relies on the many reviews I have read of the production and the few photos available. There is no archival footage.

According to my breakdown, there were approximately 14 reviews of Haas's production which were primarily positive, three that were mixed, and six that were primarily negative. They ranged from critics' raves, calling it a "landmark" production (Barnes), to those who felt that though the production was uneven, it was "one of the Rep's most considerable achievements" (Ehrlich), to those who were intrigued by the dream-play approach to the work but felt it was ultimately lacking in substance, to those who were completely disappointed by it and felt that Yale Repertory Theatre should have produced a masterpiece, considering its resources and talent on and off stage. Critics noted how rare it was to see a staging of *When We Dead Awaken* in the United States.

As with Bergman and other European directors' approach to Ibsen, Haas's production was, in contrast to most American productions of Ibsen, "highly stylized." (List) The 1971 production was included by Rolf Fjelde on his list of notable American stagings of Ibsen plays up to 1977.

"At the beginning of each act: the actors remain frozen in tableau for a few seconds, an effective way of emphasizing the play's impressionistic portraiture" (Owen) Haas also highlighted Brustein's interpretation of the play by scoring the production to Beethoven's late quartets, with a live quartet performing behind a scrim on the second level of the set. Their music intricately scored the action on stage, particularly Irene's action and the avalanche. This was his attempt to make manifest Brustein's view that:

In many ways, the play can be compared with Shakespeare's late romances or Beethoven's last quartets: the experimentation of an artist who is prepared to fall into excesses in order to expand the possibilities of his art. Like *The Winter's Tale*, for example, the play is full of minor flaws, and often inconsistent in plot and character. But it shows no falling off at all in dramatic power. Quite the contrary, it is one of the most valuable testaments we have to Ibsen's extraordinary mind and vision. And it suggests that, had he lived, Ibsen might have developed in the same direction as Strindberg or Maeterlinck, creating a

drama of the soul to which the physical events of everyday life have been completely subordinated. (*Revolt* 79)

The minimalist set design by Steve Rubin further accentuated Brustein's symbolist reading. It featured an abstract setting with rear polished wood paneling suggesting a Scandinavian spa or hunting lodge, sparsely furnished with two tables and a few bench-like structures made of stone, with primitive-looking etchings on them. Above the stage hung the white parachute-like canopy, which various critics interpreted as symbolic of the sky, clouds, death, or "a symbol of an uncertain stasis." (Eilenberg) "Steps leading to a balcony served as a mountainside on which the closing scene was played. The string quartet played Beethoven from behind a scrim on the balcony." (Isaacs)

The mystical setting was further established through Edgar Swift's lighting design, and the production's avalanche effect:

The lighting and shadows on that white cloth are the only things which really change on stage and are sometimes magical to behold. They take us from the inside of a building to a scene on the mountains with the sunlight coming through the tall lofty trees, which despite the lack of color seemed to be lush green, and in full bloom. Then to a violent snowstorm on the mountain top, and finally the avalanche. When the cloth which was the avalanche itself dropped you could almost see the white snow settling slowly and gently, giving the stage a deathly quiet. (Resnick)

Though Brustein was later unenthused by Haas's staging of the avalanche, when I asked his student Michael Posnick who had attended the production if he had any memories of it, his one vivid recollection was of the avalanche at the end. The cloth dropped down onto the stage and covered the furniture, creating what looked like "ice mountains of Norway." Posnick remembered it to be an evocative image which "theatrically showed you the world you had been living in." (Posnick) It is significant that after 37 years, that image stayed with Posnick.

As both Posnick and the reviewers noted, in contrast to Brustein's assessment of the dead never waking, Haas's final image of the production with its mixture of violence and beauty, death and release, encapsulated what the play was about and strongly resonated with Brustein's interpretation of the final scene:

As Ulfheim and Maia remain safely below, Rubek and Irene scale the mountain together to hold their marriage feast. But their climbing aspiration, like that of Brand, is finally climaxed by an avalanche; and the doomed couple are swallowed

up by the snow. As they find an ambiguous fulfillment in death, the orgasm of the spirit which no other climax can exceed, Maia sings her song of liberation from below, "I am free as a bird! I am free!"

"I am free as a bird! I am free!" It could be Rubek's epitaph as well. For, in this strange and tortured play, so reminiscent of *Oedipus at Colonus*, the sculptor finds his final release, after a life of errors, on the mountain of aspiration where only the gods can tread. (*Revolt* 82)

Critics described Rubin's costume design as aiming for a general northern European dress of the late nineteenth century. Nancy Wickwire's Irene was dressed in a ghostly white dress with correlating makeup. The nun was dressed in black, and several reviewers noted that she seemed to float across the stage. Critics pointed out that Rubek was costumed to resemble an old Ibsen. Physically equating Rubek with Ibsen expressed Brustein's tendency to link the playwright's creations with Ibsen:

Ibsen too was expressing his sense of release in this final testament of his art. For after a life of messianic striving, he is imaginatively feeling his way up the mountain, by Rubek's side, to the wide, expansive area above. It has been thirty years since Brand's prophetic cry that 'Man must struggle till he dies,' and Ibsen had spent them all in heroic combat with the trolls in his heart and mind, rebelling against the human and divine forces which would limit individual freedom...At the last, Ibsen found his way back to the mountains where, free from the 'taint' of man, liberation and revolt were pure and absolute. To a restless nature like his, always dissatisfied, always moving on, there could be no peace until death; and the total revolution he had envisioned in his youth could be realized online in apocalypse, in the pure, cold avalanche from the Northern skies. In *When We Dead Awaken*, the spiritual exile has found his homeland; the messianic prophet has found his ultimate truth; the tired artist has found his resting place. And Ibsen, the rebel, has found his release, after a lifetime of ceaseless aspiration. (ibid 82-3)

Haas seemed to be seeking an appropriate visually and aurally experimental and symbolist equivalent to Brustein's theoretical analysis of the play. Some critics felt that he 'fell into excess' whereas others thought the production was a great success.

An analysis of the reviews indicates that Haas worked to implement Brustein's ideas about the characters in his direction of the actors as well. The acting garnered a variety of reactions, from high praise for the entire cast to critique of specific actors. As mentioned, Haas had David Hurst costumed to look like an old Ibsen and Nancy Wickwire as Irene costumed to look like a specter. The critique Wickwire received is significant because it relates to Brustein's

conception in *Ibsen and Revolt* of Irene — “Regarded by realistic standards, she looks like a homicidal maniac, but realism is rather alien to the play; she is more like a symbolic figure—an allegorical spirit of Nemesis.” (ibid, 80) The positive reviews of her portrayal appreciated that she had “a cold intensity and projects a menacing aura of strangeness and unendurable agonies which well-nigh causes flesh to creep.” (Day) The negative reviews complained that she either “worked too hard at seeming really insane” (Anderson) or felt that despite the ghostly costuming and makeup, her performance did not match her look.

Brustein had interpreted Ulfheim as a “Scandinavian Stanley Kowalski” (*Revolt* 81) and Haas appropriately cast recent Yale School of Drama graduate Stephen Mendillo. Medillo was described by reviewers as being appropriately masculine and physically suited for the part.

Haas had the actresses Sarah Albertson, a Yale School of Drama graduate and company member, and Carmen de Lavallade, a dancer, alternate the roles of Maia and the Nun throughout the run. Lavallade received particular praise for her performance of the Nun. Her dance training allowed her to give the sense that the mysterious symbolic character was gliding rather than walking. (Day) By having the actresses playing Maia and the Nun alternate their role, Haas drew a link between the two characters who Irene must overcome to extract her revenge on Rubek “with a small stiletto she carries with her.” (*Revolt* 81) It is interesting to note that Lavallade is an African-American dancer. Robert Wilson would also cast an African-American dancer in the nun-like role of Irene’s shadow in his production.

Having laid out Haas’s application of Brustein’s theory in his production, I can now address the question: What led to his revised assessment of YRT’s *When We Dead Awaken*? Two clues are Martin Gottfried’s review and a comment Brustein made at “An Evening with Robert Brustein”.

Gottfried concluded his positive review with an enigmatic coda:

Brustein has written of *When We Dead Awaken* with praise and passion, insisting that it is not a naturalistic play as it would seem, but mystic and surreal. Obviously influenced by Brustein’s analysis, Haas had Steve Rubin design an abstract set (which looks like an institutional interior) with a billowing, overhanging sheet—to represent omnipresent death—and drew spaced out readings from the company. This gave the production a tensi[b]le strength that the play lacks, but it did not validate Brustein’s theory. (Gottfried)

Gottfried is important because he is the first critic to explicate that Haas was applying Brustein's theory to the stage. What is strange about his review is that though he praises the production, he claims that it does not validate Brustein's theory. That is a contradiction, for he thought the production was successful and the production was built upon Brustein's theory. How can a production, which in his opinion successfully applied a theory on stage, not validate the theory on which it is based? Although what Gottfried argues is enigmatic and seemingly a contradiction in terms, the tension he raises between theory and performance provides a useful lens through which to analyze why Brustein eventually found Haas's method wanting.

Brustein stated that Haas "had read my chapter [in *Theater of Revolt*] too carefully." (ISA 5) Haas was the head of the acting program and associate director of the Yale School of Drama. According to Michael Posnick, who was his student, he was known as an actors' director rather than a highly conceptual auteur director. His process in the rehearsal room involved long improvisations in character, which provided actors the time and space to discover their characters. (Posnick) Despite the fact that his strength was working with actors, Haas chose a decidedly conceptual approach to the production, using Brustein's theory. He used a new translation done by Michael Feingold, the company's literary manager who had been one of Brustein's students at Yale. Tom Haas had previously directed a production of *Peer Gynt* when he was on the faculty at Emerson College (*When We Dead Awaken* Program) and would go on to direct a memorable production of *Peer Gynt* "refashioned for Appalachia at the turn of the century" (Cameron) at Indiana Repertory Theater, where he was later artistic director. He was tragically struck and killed by a van in 1991 when he was preparing for rehearsals later that month for his production of *Hedda Gabler* at Indiana Rep.

Though Haas had prior experience directing Ibsen and would direct other notable productions in the future, he was not an auteur director and, as evidenced by his using Brustein's theory as his guide, did not employ a personal aesthetic to filter Brustein's ideas. Though Brustein initially felt the production was a success, in hindsight Haas's production illustrated to Brustein the limitations of his first essay *Ibsen and Revolt*. He had written the essay purely as theory when he was engaged in academia and criticism. He had not written his theory with the intent that it be applied to productions. By reading Brustein's essay "too closely" Haas was not giving himself the space as an artist to bring his own aesthetic to bear on the material. It was therefore, in a sense, not a complete merger of theory and practice, of scholarship and art.

Brustein's aim at Yale was twofold: to inspire artists to reengage with classical texts and revitalize them onstage, and to provide a forum for scholars and audiences to see works they were familiar with in an academic setting, on the page, come alive onstage.

The experience affected Brustein twofold. First, for future Ibsen productions, when not directing them himself, he would choose directors with a strong personal (and usually highly visual) aesthetic through which to filter Ibsen's work. Second, in his subsequent theoretical writings "The Crack in the Chimney" and "The Fate of Ibsenism", Brustein's aim would be to engage both American theater artists and scholars with an interpretation of Ibsen which they would find provocative and theatrically compelling.

Brustein's influence seems to have crossed the pond to England as well. I came across reviews of a 1975 British production of the play (there is no mention of which translation) done by the Watermill Theatre near Newbury. Brustein's influence is clear in one *London Times's* critic's near-quoting from *Theatre of Revolt* when discussing the play. How appropriate that a scholar-practitioner who was greatly affected by the European work model and aesthetic should have his theory absorbed by European critics.

YRT's 1971 production of *When We Dead Awaken* was an auspicious beginning to Brustein's exploration of Ibsen on the stage. Though not perfect, it expressed the laboratory nature of Brustein's theaters in which theories and work methods were tested, risks were taken, lessons were learned and incorporated into the next production or theoretical article. Michael Feingold's translation was used by several theater companies to stage new productions of the play throughout the 1970s. The unique nature of the theater and school as well as their importance in the American theater community underscores the hole in the Markers' analysis. He would go on to produce four of the six plays they analyze. Yet these North American scholars, who are committed to the theory that Ibsen can be understood through the staging of his works, ignored Brustein's contribution to the field of bridging Ibsen production and theory in the United States.

Part 3
The Wild Duck – YRT 1978
New Methods in Brustein's Theory and Practice

Frederick and Lise-Lone Marker titled their section on *The Wild Duck* Ibsen's "New Method": *The Wild Duck*. The play features Ibsen's new bold use of symbolism as well as an "acute theatrical irony (the subtle mingling of comedy and seriousness in word, action and visual image)..." (Marker 127) They note that even in Europe, where a non-naturalistic approach was often used to stage many of Ibsen's plays. "*The Wild Duck* remained surprisingly, almost stubbornly, impervious to the innovations of the anti-naturalistic movement that swept across the face of Europe during the early years of this [20th] century. Even the look-alike quality of the production photographs preserved for this play seems striking in retrospect." (Marker 141) The Markers explain that the reason for this is the exacting way Ibsen had "directed his play on paper." (Ibid) It is only with Ingmar Bergman's production in 1972 and less famously Pål Løkkeberg's 1965 production in which naturalism was discarded. (ibid 144)

Although there was nothing "look-alike" about Brustein's 1978 production, which he set within the aperture of a camera, the Markers ignored it. His own new American method of interpreting Ibsen had been developing slowly over the previous few years. Ibsen's sesquicentennial was a period of great cross-pollination between theory and practice in Brustein's work. It was expressed both in "A Crack in the Chimney" and "The Fate of Ibsenism," which he published that year, and his own production of *The Wild Duck* at YRT.

Brustein sought to offer an alternative interpretation of Ibsen's method to the traditional social-realist approach embodied by Arthur Miller and his disciples. Whereas in the 1960s Brustein attacked Miller's bowdlerization of Ibsen's individualism, in the 1970s his target was Miller's idealization of determinism and causality in Ibsen's dramatic method. But in the early '60s, Brustein's conception of this idea was still in its nascent stages. In his discussion of *Ghosts* in *The Theatre of Revolt*, Brustein disassociated Ibsen from the Scribean well-made play: "After careful study of the Greeks, he has junked the techniques of the well-made play in favor of the more integrated structures of Sophoclean tragedy...as Francis Fergusson has observed, the work is constructed on the pattern of *Oedipus*." (*Revolt* 67-9) He also alluded specifically to the absence of causality and determinism in Ibsen's work in one brief mention of *The Master*

Builder. He argued that “*The Master Builder* is free from all considerations of biology, determinism, and Darwinism...” (ibid 78) This statement is brief and exclusive to *The Master Builder*.

Brustein attended and reviewed Bergman’s production of *The Wild Duck* in 1973 during his sabbatical year in London. His review would not be republished in any of his collections of criticism. Evident in the review was that even by 1973, Brustein had yet to reject the notion of causality in Ibsen’s oeuvre. With regard to *The Wild Duck* production he wrote, “Bergman has not been able to conceal the contrived symbolism and old fashioned causality of the play particularly evident in Ibsen’s rigid notions of heredity...” (*The New Republic*, 6/16/73) It would be five years before he would crystallize the idea of Ibsen as a non-causal playwright.

In my interview with Brustein I asked him how his non-causal approach to Ibsen developed. He replied that his aim with Ibsen was always to “draw Ibsen away from realism” (Brustein) and “The Crack in the Chimney” was the fullest expression of that. He had argued for a non-causal approach to Ibsen in “Drama in the Age of Einstein,” which was published on the front page of the Sunday Arts & Leisure section of *The New York Times* published on August 7th, 1977. The article was expanded and re-titled “Theatre in the Age of Einstein: The Crack in the Chimney” in 1978. In a letter to the Times editor, a reader mentioned that a more accurate title for Brustein’s article would have been “Drama in the Age of Heisenberg,” for it was he, not Einstein, who had formulated the uncertainty principle –and what Brustein was arguing was really that an uncertainty of cause pervaded Ibsen’s universe. (“Theater Mailbag” NY Times, 9/4/ 1977 60)

Though the reader was correct, the reason Brustein chose Einstein was because he references Robert Wilson and Philip Glass’s *Einstein on the Beach* in his article. I would also like to suggest that Brustein’s association of “A Crack in the Chimney” to Einstein goes deeper. On some level, his linking Ibsen to a non-causal, uncertain world of relativity and Einstein related to a letter he received from Eric Bentley on August 7th of an unspecified year in the early ’60s when he was writing *The Theatre of Revolt*. In the letter, Bentley wrote Brustein, “...you belong to the Atomic Age true, what is marvelous about Ibsen is that he was of the Atomic Age before its time...” (Bentley, Letter to Brustein) Ibsen was ahead of his time and Brustein would

provide an innovative interpretation of the playwright's work in "The Crack in the Chimney" to reflect that:

What Ibsen is anticipating, in this passage, is the significant turn that theatre was to take sometime around the end of the nineteenth century...the artistic departure which was responsible, in part, for the movement called modernism...For Ibsen has quietly proceeded to undermine a basic assumption of the naturalist universe—namely, that cause A precedes consequence B, which in turn is responsible for the catastrophe C. Isn't it possible, he suggests, that A has nothing whatsoever to do with B, much less with C, regardless of the apparent evidence? Isn't it possible that events are so multiple and complex that human intelligence may never be able to comprehend the full set of causes preceding any situation, consequence, or feeling? Ibsen, in short, is attempting to repeal the simple, fundamental law of cause-and-effect which has been the unquestioned statute since the Enlightenment—the law that rules the linear, logical, rationalistic world of literature, and, in particular, the Western literature of guilt. (*Critical Moments* 108-9)

Brustein expanded the idea of Ibsen as a non-causal playwright, which he first developed in "The Crack in the Chimney" in relation to *The Master Builder*, to include Ibsen's earlier plays in "The Fate of Ibsenism". Brustein linked his views on *The Master Builder* to those other plays when he wrote, "The Vikings and trolls of Ibsen's earlier drama lurk behind every door and window of *The Wild Duck* and *The Master Builder*..." (ibid 128) Brustein's newly expansive view was clearly influenced by his intense engagement with *The Wild Duck* in the theater at YRT. He wrote "The Fate of Ibsenism" while working on *The Wild Duck* at YRT and delivered it as the keynote address of the Ibsen Sesquicentennial Symposium immediately after the production opened. His revised interpretation of *The Wild Duck* stood in stark contrast to his view on causality when he reviewed Ingmar Bergman's production five years earlier.

Brustein was not originally scheduled to direct *The Wild Duck*. But as he recalls in his memoir of his years as dean of the Yale School of Drama, *Making Scenes*: "I was soon engaged in the preparation for the final production of the year: Ibsen's *The Wild Duck*. My participation as director of this production was another understudy assignment, since all the directors we had approached had fallen through, but it was a chore I attacked with pleasure." (*Scenes* 267) He revealed to me in my interview with him that he was replacing Andrei Serban as director.

Serban, originally from Romania, worked often at YRT and ART. He ended up directing Moliere's *Sganarelle* at YRT that season. Brustein liked his aesthetic partially because

His work on the classics was always to serve the classics, always to find the metaphor for the classic to make it clear what it was about. And I thought that was very special. He would find the metaphor in the play and use that instead of imposing his own idiot notions on it. (Brustein)

Not only did Brustein substitute Serban he tried "to imagine the way he might do it. I looked for metaphors too." (ibid) This not only influenced Brustein's approach to staging *The Wild Duck*, and by extension Ibsen, but it also influenced him as a critic and producer. "That became part of my critical apparatuses and my producing apparatus as an artistic director. I would urge the director to find the metaphor of the play and then make that into a visual and an acting metaphor if possible." (ibid) This directorial approach, I believe, also influenced "The Fate of Ibsenism". He wrote in his address, "Let me frame my remarks in the form of an exhortation to future Ibsen directors and readers: Find the poem inside the play, and you will have found the play." (*Critical Moments* 128)

Brustein's exhortation of "find the poem inside the play, and you have found the play" in one sentence encapsulates his approach to Ibsen from then on. It became his guiding principle in understanding and staging Ibsen. As mentioned in Michael Bertin's unpublished dramaturg's log for *The Wild Duck*, Brustein previously told his cast on the first day of rehearsals, March 6, 1978, what he would go on to say in his address at the Ibsen Symposium the following month, "All the Ibsen plays have a poem. We must find the poem in this play" (Bertin 2)

Brustein composed the keynote address for the Ibsen Symposium while working on *The Wild Duck* production at YRT. To what extent, though, did he manage to implement this new practical theoretical approach of "finding the poem" in his own production of *The Wild Duck*? An analysis of Bertin's dramaturg's log, reviews, and Brustein's own writings on the production can provide insight.

In contrast to Bergman's approach which "succeeded in distilling and revealing the inner essence of each of the characters with camera-like definition of focus" (Marker 150) or Peter Zadek's Marxist 1975 Hamburg production (ibid 154-5) Brustein's aesthetic, though also non-naturalistic, was neither marked by a unique acting style as expressed in Bergman's oeuvre, nor

an overt political agenda as used in Zadek's approach. Instead, he sought to find a metaphor for the production and was inspired by *On Photography*, which had recently been published by Susan Sontag. Brustein mentioned Sontag's work to production dramaturg Michael Bertin during their first conversation on January 17, 1978. (Bertin 1)

Sontag's work resonates strongly with *The Wild Duck*. "Using a camera appeases the anxiety which the work-driven feel about not working when they are on vacation and supposed to be having fun. They have something to do that is like a friendly imitation of work: they can take pictures" (Sontag 7) Her analysis, though discounted by serious photography theorists, underscored a particularly American perspective of work and leisure, and the interplay between the two. Brustein discovered that not only was Sontag's insight on photography expressing fundamental ideas about the American national psyche, it resonated with elements of Ibsen's play as well and could serve as a bridge between cultures and time periods. Sontag's above analysis brings to mind Hjalmar Ekdal's own imitation of work through touching up photos: "(Sees Gina in the kitchen doorway.) I? No, I haven't the time; I've got to work. But that means new mechanism—" (Fjelde 433)

Sontag's analysis of photography has nefarious implications related to American culture and policy which resonate with *The Wild Duck*. The Werle family's interference in the lives of the Ekdals echoes Sontag's "Picture-taking is an event in itself, and one with ever more peremptory rights - to interfere with, to invade, or to ignore whatever is going on." (Sontag 8) Through *On Photography*, Brustein found a metaphor which could be politically resonant to Americans, but he treated it with a far subtler approach than Zadek. Brustein let his production speak for itself. (He did discuss the political relevance of *The Wild Duck* in particular, and Ibsen in general, in both "The Fate of Ibsenism" and "The Artist and the Citizen".)

More importantly, Brustein had found an image - the camera - through which he could honor and accentuate Ibsen's symbolism and poetic vision. It also allowed him to create a theatrical commentary on Ibsen's realistic work, which the playwright was transitioning away from with the "New Method" of *The Wild Duck*. "The kind of realism he had invented for his "modern" plays was itself a form of photography in that it imposed a documentary surface over an essentially poetic vision." (*Scenes* 267) Clearly, Brustein had come to appreciate Ibsen's use of symbols in the play after calling them clumsy in his review of Bergman's production.

Brustein's non-naturalistic approach honored Ibsen's symbolism of seeing and blindness and accentuated it. His production made Ibsen's play relevant to both artists and audiences on an aesthetic, political, and cultural level. Thus, with his production Brustein unearthed on stage Ibsen's poetic vision from beneath its realistic surface.

In their first production meeting, Bertin, having just read *On Photography* noted that:

Hjalmar Ekdal's studio is "like a camera, with the upstage, double doors serving as 'shutters' on an image of reality." Bob likes the idea, and Jonathan points out that the word "camera" derives from the Latin word for "room". I suspect this idea will be incorporated in our concept for the set. I also suggest using photographs on the set to underscore the concept. Hjalmar Ekdal is a photographer, and the play is about distortions, reductions and evasions of reality. Sontag employs photography as a metaphor to attack the myopia of our culture. She is less against photography per se, than against the uses to which it can be put. (Bertin 1)

Brustein and his scenic designer Michael Yeargan developed this idea and it became the poetic metaphor for the production. Brustein describes his approach as follows:

We decided to take this metaphor literally and look at the play as if it were a gigantic black-and-white photograph; our perspective would be the lens of a camera. This lens would replace the curtain, opening and closing on the scene, and catching the characters in candid still poses. The initial opening of the lens—at the beginning of the play—would be accompanied by a blinding light and an electronic musical sting: It would reveal Hjalmar taking a flashpot picture of the Werle dinner party to which he had been invited by his friend Gregers. The same photograph would then be enlarged and mounted on the wall of Ekdal's studio, changing form and symbolic meaning in each of the succeeding acts. In its first appearance it would be an enlargement of old Werle and Mrs. Soerby in evening clothes. In the next scene it would be joined by a close-up of old Werle's head. And finally, it would become a huge blowup of old Werle's eyes—so central to a play about hereditary blindness (and *seeing*), so emblematic of the way the Werle family was taking over the Ekdal household...The final image of the production... would be the wild duck itself. After Gregers, standing in the center of the lens, speaks the final words of the play, saying it is his fate to always be thirteenth at the table, and Dr. Relling, spits in disgust, the same blinding light that began the play would go off, leaving an afterimage of a blue duck rising from the depth of the sea—held for fifteen seconds as the image faded, the stage went to black, and the camera lens closed. It was the only spot of color in the whole dramatic photograph, suggesting the transcendent release Hedvig found in death, suggesting also the underwater quality of the play. (*Scenes* 267)

Brustein's visually striking production was certainly a far cry from earlier "look-alike" productions which the Markers described. Michael Yeargan created the unique set; Jeanne Button, an Associate Professor of Design at Yale, designed the monochromatic period costumes; and William B. Warfel, the Administrator of the Design Department at Yale and Lighting Director for both the school and YRT, lit the show with strong shading, silhouettes, and blackouts to strengthen the photograph theme. Critics, regardless of their views on the production heralded the striking design: "Michael Yeargan's breath-taking stage design (not so much scenery as 'stage design') is ingenious, probably among the Ten Most Ingenious Sets seen anywhere, ever, on the legitimate stage." (Cohen)

YRT's production was more than just an innovative use of stage design. As Brustein's description of the opening implied, Hjalmar attended the Werles' party with his camera. Brustein was suggesting from the first moment that he was not only a guest at the party but also an employee, the party photographer. He thus immediately laid out the power dynamic between the Werles and the Ekdals. It was Haakon Werle who literally provided not only Old Ekdal, but also Hjalmar with his livelihood.

In his dramaturg's log Michael Bertin provides us insight into Brustein's work with the actors. The stylization extended beyond the design to the acting as well. Brustein had instructed his cast on the first day of rehearsals that he was seeking an acting style that "will go beyond literal realism. It will be bigger than life. We need a 'powerful reality' as a base, but we can go as far as surrealism." (Bertin 2)

The exposition in act 1 will be ritualized. It will be played as out-and-out exposition, as it is clearly that...At the party, Gregers is as uncomfortable as Hjalmar: either one could be the thirteenth at table. (ibid)

Brustein wants to express the tension between the wit and gaiety on the surface, and the unease beneath. 'All people are uncomfortable at this party.' 'Mrs. Soerby is "coming up in society, and all the guests play up to her.'" She is thus one of the focal points of the blocking of the scene. (ibid 4)

Mrs. Soerby was played by Brustein's late wife Norma, an accomplished actress in her own right, who was on the acting faculty at Yale. By focusing on the tension between the first act's comedic party atmosphere and the unease all the characters are feeling underneath the surface – though one critic described Werle's party as a "satirical, nearly farcical opening scene at the

dinner party” (Johnson) – Brustein insured that the first act would not come across exclusively as a comedic prologue to an otherwise tragic play. Rather, it set up and foreshadowed the later acts. “Brustein has used the camera set shrewdly, placing only certain actions behind the opened shutter. The dinner party and the engaged couple [at the Ekdal’s studio] are photographed in the lower half.” (ibid)

Bertin described the Ekdal home as a place where time has stopped, and Hjalmar returning from the Werles’ party is “a rare messenger from the outside world.” (Bertin, 3) As Ibsen had written the play, Gregers’s arrival in the Ekdal home shakes things up, but in Brustein’s production he literally does so. Brustein had given Walken a copy of *Brand* to read in preparation for the role. He had compared Gregers to Brand in *The Theatre of Revolt*. A critic showed how this was expressed in Brustein’s direction of Walken:

When Christopher Walken, as a wide-eyed Gregers Werle, full of self-righteousness and shoddy truth –seeking, bursts into the garret home of his impoverished photographer friend, Hjalmar Ekdal, in the Yale Repertory Theater’s production of Ibsen’s *The Wild Duck*, he not only trails dark intimations of the eventual tragedy his meddling will bring to Ekdal’s family but also very nearly tears the house down with his raging, roaming idealism run amuck. It is a remarkable scene and a remarkable performance by Walken. He knocks things over, crashes about, seems to careen off the walls with energetic fever, an unnecessary tiger set loose in a flock of sheep...He is at once terrifying and almost pathetically comic in his misplaced zeal to force a simple foolish man like Ekdal into the role of moral hero. (Roberts)

Walken had been cast as Gregers immediately after he completed filming on *The Deer Hunter*, for which he would win an Academy Award. He received unanimous raves for his Gregers and was the star of the production. The one actor to whom Brustein struggled to convey the style he was seeking was Eugene Troobnick, who played Hjalmar. Brustein and many of the reviewers felt that Gene Troobnick as Hjalmar had been miscast. “The Wild Duck had its problems. I had miscast a crucial role in order to satisfy a member of the company, and much of the rehearsal air was taken up trying to coach this actor into the performance I wanted.” (*Scenes* 268) Bertin’s log provides further insight into the problem and how it manifested itself in the rehearsal process.

First trouble. Gene Troobnick (Hjalmar) is off today. He is playing Hjalmar in Act I with too much sentiment—almost sentimentally—instead of in a self-dramatizing way. The point is we don’t want the audience to share Hjalmar’s opinion of himself. Brustein wants Hjalmar played as a “tragic figure with

Shakespearean scope,” not as a figure from a soap opera. Gene’s entire psychology is thrown off. He sees Hjalmar as very uncomfortable in the initial act, and trying to hide in a threatening atmosphere: as a man of commerce who is awed by the scene. Gene is harping on the fact that the camera prop is very much on his mind. He claims that Hjalmar would be immobilized by the camera to the extent that he could not self-dramatize; that the commercial reminder would impede the character’s ability to be expansive. Brustein is making the point that Hjalmar must be larger, with greater sweep, if he is to convince the audience that Gregers could mistake him for a genius. It is the self-dramatizing element that Gregers could mistake for a touch of greatness. Gene sees Brustein’s point, and agrees to work on it. I think Gene is miscast. For one thing, his physical appearance contradicts the flair and flamboyance Brustein is after. (Bertin 5)

Some critics though were content with Troobnick’s performance as Hjalmar. They noted how he was often cast in comedic roles at YRT. This is of particular interest because the Markers have written that comedic actors were often cast in the role, though Ibsen had specifically noted that “Hjalmar must not be played with any trace of parody.” (Marker 139) Bertin notes at the end of his log that “Gene kept working at his part and by the final performance he surmounted some of his difficulty.” (Ibid 11)

In Brustein’s previously mentioned description of the production, he described *The Wild Duck* as “a play about hereditary blindness (and *seeing*)”. He had previously discussed the issues of causality and heredity in his review of Bergman’s production. Fundamentally, the play is a critique of certainty. How, then, did he grapple with these issues in light of his own changing views of Ibsen’s causality? The main moments in the play through which to explore Brustein’s interpretation are his treatment of Haakon and Gregers Werle’s confrontation at the end of Act One, and the question of who is Hedvig’s father.

During rehearsal on March 13, 1978 Bertin observed that in the confrontation between Haakon [Shepperd Strudwick] and Gregers Werle [Christopher Walken] at the end of Act 1, “The question of Werle’s guilt arises. Shepperd [Werle] has to decide on his character’s degree of guilt. Ibsen leaves it ambiguous. Brustein is in favor of Werle’s guilt, or else why wouldn’t Werle exonerate himself before his son?” (Bertin 6) It is important that Brustein acknowledged the ambiguity of the situation even though he believed Werle to be guilty. The actor Shepperd Strudwick, in contrast to Brustein, “seems to have developed a favorable view of Werle.” (ibid) Despite personally believing in Werle’s guilt, Brustein established a nuanced and fully

developed framework for the actors to explore during rehearsal. Bertin describes Brustein's approach with the actors: "[As] Gregers is expressing pent-up hate, and attacking his father to the point of schism, Brustein [had the two actors explore], 'Who loves the other more?' [In] Brustein's view: Gregers doesn't expect his father's offer of a partnership. Instead, he expects to get kicked out of the house." (ibid) Finally, Brustein hinted to Christopher Walken, who played Gregers that

the mother was insane and neurotic. Gregers sees only his mother's sensitivity. Brustein is leading him towards a perception of his relationship with Hjalmar. In other words, he is blind regarding his mother's character, blind on Hjalmar, and blind on human relations in general. (ibid)

Brustein treated the issue of Werle's guilt in a manner which honored the complex uncertainty of the situation. He gave the actors strong motivations in a variety of directions that were both playable and might yield dynamic results. Regarding this scene, a critic wrote, "His [Gregers'] confrontations with his father (played by Shepperd Strudwick) build up his credibility. One accepts totally the existence of Gregers." (Isaacs)

There is a tension in Brustein's approach in regards to Hedvig's blindness, and the identity of her father from whom she inherited deteriorating vision. It was decided early in rehearsals that "Hedvig is suffering from glaucoma. It is hereditary and degenerative." (Bertin, 4) I found that while Brustein's textual approach honored the uncertainty of cause, his physical staging, though imaginative, lacked complexity and uncertainty. Textually (as described in the dramaturg's log) Brustein used Michael Meyer's translation, with adjustments to his anglicisms and other revisions based on Michael Bertin's comparative reading of Meyer, Fjelde, McFarlane, and Archer's translations. It was then cut down to a two-and-a-half hour running time with the aim of heightening the uncertainty in the script by cutting language which was extraneous, repetitive, and too explicit. "An example of things to cut would be the surprises about Hedvig's blindness—once is enough." (ibid 1-2) Further cuts and revisions were made in rehearsal with the actors.

By not harping on Hedvig's blindness Brustein, at least textually, allowed for the possibility that her hereditarily weak eyes stem from either Haakon Werle or Hjalmar's mother –

“Gina: Hjalmar’s mother had weak eyes too.” (Ibsen/Meyer, Production Script 72) Later, Gregers reveals all to Hjalmar and Hedvig receives a letter from Werle. Hearing she received a gift, Hedvig asks her father “What did I get?” (ibid 168) Brustein cut the whole next section which, as written, included “(Hedvig goes over to the lamp and reads the letter under it. Hjalmar softly, clenching his fist) The eyes! The eyes! And then this letter!...” (ibid) By doing so he allowed for the possibility of uncertainty to exist regarding who Hedvig’s father is.

In contrast, the design worked against the nuanced approach to the text. For the final photo of the series to appear above the stage, Brustein chose “a huge blowup of old Werle’s eyes—so central to a play about hereditary blindness (and *seeing*), so emblematic of the way the Werle family was taking over the Ekdal household” (*Scenes* 267) While it did underscore how the Werle family had invaded, on all levels, the Ekdal home, it also undermined the ambiguity of cause and certainty which Brustein had established until that point, and which he had written so powerfully about in “A Crack in the Chimney”. When I asked Brustein about this in our interview he said, “There was no way to go with that. I was more interested in the *image* of eyes than I was in who is to blame, who is the father? I think that had to remain ambiguous because that’s the way Ibsen wrote it. Which doesn’t mean he hadn’t been sleeping with Gina. Indeed he had been.” (Brustein)

Some of the critics, despite the display of Werle’s eyes in close-up on stage, felt that some ambiguity regarding Hedvig’s parentage was successfully maintained: “Hjalmar conceives the possibility she might not be his own child.” (Zukowsky) Zukowsky uses the word “might” which implies doubt rather than certainty.

The last major element of *The Wild Duck* which the Markers analyzed is different directors’ treatment of the attic space and Hedvig’s suicide. They note that Pål Løkkeberg and Ingmar Bergman were the first two directors to “conceive of the Ekdal attic in dematerialized terms, as a place of the imagination rather than a physical reality” (Markers, 147); they placed this space in full view of the audience downstage. Brustein’s loft was also visible to the audience, but it was an actual physical setting. “Equally as impressive is the design for the loft where the wild duck is kept and where Old Ekdal and Hjalmar go hunting rabbits. We see it through a translucent screen—giving it the other-worldly effect which Hedvig describes as being ‘like the bottom of the cold, blue sea.’” (Zukowsky)

Brustein and Yeargan devised a loft space which embodied the coded language Hedvig uses when communicating with Gregers. Brustein not only created a physical space to embody these symbols, but he also worked with the actor Blanche Baker and Christopher Walken to make their language real and meaningful and to clarify the dynamic between them. Bertin described the development of Hedvig and Gregers' relationship in the rehearsal process. "The scene [where they first discuss the wild duck] has an hypnotic quality. The two share a kinship. Gregers is like the Rat Wife in *Little Eyolf*; leading children to their death" (Bertin 6) At another point he provides Brustein's insight into their way of communicating: "Brustein: Gregers is a symbol monger. This is his retreat from reality. Hedvig is a poet, and understands him." (ibid 4) In a later rehearsal Bertin noted of "Gregers and Hedvig: There is a perverse quality to their scenes. Gregers waits on corners for little girls." (ibid 5) Brustein clarified a subtext in this production's interpretation of their final scene together: "Gregers' advice to kill the duck is really asking Hedvig to kill herself." (Bertin 4)

Løkkeberg and Bergman staged Hedvig's suicide in full view of the audience. Brustein, in contrast, staged it behind a translucent scrim through which the audience can see but the others actors on stage could not. "When her body is found, Hjalmar screams heavenward, "Why have you done this to me?" He bemoans his hardness of heart and united with his wife to carry their child to her bedroom..." (Zukowsky) I have already presented Brustein's description of the final moments of the play. Critics agreed that he had found a powerful closing image to his highly visual production. "...above, in earth tones muted by scrim, is the world of illusion and of symbol, the loft-retreat where the wild duck lies docilely in its basket until it takes flight in the final, deeply moving image of the play." (Johnson)

Brustein's production influenced more than just his Sesquicentennial address. Travis S. Preston, a directing student at the Yale School of Drama, was the assistant director to Brustein on the production. After working with Brustein in this new approach to staging Ibsen, he would go on to be the major director and leading force in the short-lived but important American Ibsen Theater. With this production, Brustein literally served as the model for a radically new approach to staging Ibsen in the United States.

In the brochure for the following season (1978-79) at YRT there was an announcement that the final offering of that season, just as in the previous season, would be a production of an Ibsen play directed by Robert Brustein. This time the proposed plays were *Brand* and *Ghosts*. Again, as with *When We Dead Awaken* and *The Wild Duck*, the promotional materials were inspired by Brustein's own writings about the plays:

Brand is a charismatic young preacher with an idiosyncratic creed, who will sacrifice anything or anyone in his uncompromising pursuit of his own vision of God. The play that established Ibsen's reputation as the foremost playwright of the 19th century, *Brand* is an intensely poetic exposition of the clash of the individual will against all the forces of human society—family, church, community—and ultimately against the very idea of God.

Ghosts, one of the best-known plays of Ibsen's "realistic-period", concerns the disastrous effects of the past on the present and the future. Though it appears on the surface to be a family drama, *Ghosts* is at base a moral tragedy of Sophoclean dimensions, and an attempt to explore and explode the hypocrisies of the unexamined life. (YRT, Season Brochure 1978-9)

Due to a change in presidents at Yale University, there was a shakeup the following year and Robert Brustein left Yale at the end of the 1978-79 season, his 13th season. What would have been his final production at the theater never happened. He would take most of the staff and ensemble with him when he moved to Harvard to create the American Repertory Theatre. His replacement at YRT and the Yale School of Drama was Lloyd Richards, a distinguished African-American theater director who had been the director of the National Playwrights Conference at the Eugene O'Neill Memorial Theater Center in Waterford, Connecticut. Richards was playwright August Wilson's champion and director. As discussed in the Introduction, Brustein linked Arthur Miller and August Wilson in "the theater of guilt".

Though Brustein would no longer be at Yale, his impact on the theater was lasting. *Little Eyolf* was under consideration for Richards's second season (Frankel, NY Times). It was not done at that point but a production of *Hedda Gabler*, featuring the acclaimed African-American actor James Earl Jones as Judge Brack, was staged by Richards in March of 1980. Rolf Fjelde would become the in-house translator and in 1982-83 YRT would stage *A Dolls House*, and the Drama School would mount productions of *The Pillars of Society* as well as the world premiere of Fjelde's translation of *Peer Gynt*. (Yale Newsletters, 1982). In an interview with Richards after his first season at Yale, the interviewer noted that critics joked after seeing his season

schedule, “Here comes the 14th Brustein season.” (Frankel) The 14th Brustein season would actually take place at his new artistic home at ART. Brustein would finally get his chance to direct *Ghosts* in his third season there in 1982.

Part 4
Ghosts – ART 1982
Finding the Poem in a Haunted House

Brustein sought to bring a European aesthetic to the American theater. His production of *Ghosts* is another example of his new approach. There had been a European tradition of modernist productions of *Ghosts* since Max Reinhardt's collaboration with Edvard Munch in 1906, but that tradition did not really exist in the United States. Even in Europe "Ibsen's major prose plays have generally, by their very nature, tended to elicit less in the way of freer formal experiments based on symbolic design concepts, radically stylized costumes, expressionistic lighting effects, and the like." (Marker 111) With *The Wild Duck* Brustein had shown the potential of adapting symbolic design concepts to a major prose play. With *Ghosts* he preserved Ibsen's drawing room, a setting that was consistently maintained in the various productions the Markers did analyze. Brustein though, used lighting and other staging effects to put his poetic, symbolic stamp on the production. His mission to find the poem in the play echoes previous calls by European luminaries such as Reinhardt's "revealing that which stands between and behind the words in Ibsen" (ibid 114) and Edward Gordon Craig's "We must ever remember our artistry and forget our propensity towards photography, we must for this new poet re-form a new Theatre." (ibid 119)

Brustein's approach to the production connects to his 1962 review of David Ross's production of *Ghosts* titled "Finding a Cure for Syphilis". In addition to critiquing the production itself, Brustein critiqued those who interpreted *Ghosts* as being an outdated play about syphilis. He told me in our interview that throughout his work on Ibsen, "I kept focusing on [Ibsen's] line 'I am more of a poet and less of a social philosopher than most people realize.'" (Brustein) His aim was to focus on Ibsen's poetic vision and timeless exploration of the human soul. This is also reflected in his negative critique of David Ross's production. In addition to his problems with the cast, acting, interpretation, translation, and staging, Brustein takes Ross to task for ignoring the symbolism inherent in Ibsen's stage directions. Brustein particularly disapproves of the loss of the view of the fjords and conservatory garden in Ross's production. They are supposed to serve as a contrast to the stifling setting of the play and the related contrasts in lighting. (*Discontent* 59)

Brustein intended to prove that the play could still be fresh and relevant to contemporary audiences, and to expose the poem in the play. He set out to accomplish the first goal by writing a new adaptation of the text, by using an opening sound cue to bridge time periods, and through his casting.

Brustein's adaptation aimed:

to unstiffen the prose, to make the dialogue more direct without adding a false contemporary sound. It has to be language that contemporary actors are at home with, so that they don't feel themselves sliding back into history and losing connection with the characters. I've tried to make the language dance a little; I've tried to make it relaxed and speakable—as I'm sure it was in Ibsen's time. (ART News 1982)

Brustein's choice of music for the start of the show was a less than subtle attempt at contemporary resonance. Though he kept the play set in its original period, the first sound cue prior to the curtain rising was Pink Floyd's "We Don't Need No Education," complimented with tiny dots of light flooding the space creating an eerie disco ball-like effect. Some critics thought the song, with its fitting lyrics of rejecting authority, was effective in providing a contemporary bridge between worlds. Others either did not understand the song's reference, did not think it was effective, or found it heavy-handed.

Unlike other productions that portrayed Mrs. Alving and Pastor Manders as being quite older, Brustein attempted to make the production fresh and relatable and the dynamic between the characters more interesting by casting younger actors.

Mrs. Alving doesn't have to be older than 46 or 47...I'm delighted to have Kathleen Widdoes playing this part, as opposed to a 60- or 70-year-old actress, who [would] usually play it. The same with Pastor Manders—a major problem in the play is that Pastor Manders is usually too easy a mark, a stick figure, too self-righteous, self-important. And he has no consciousness of himself at all. Obviously Ibsen wrote him out of some rage and irony...I believe Manders must have some charm and charisma to help us understand why Mrs. Alving gave her heart to him in her youth. Why would she be more attracted to Pastor Manders than her own lively and attractive husband? I suspect it had something to do with his evangelical dynamism. There must be a little bit of William Sloane Coffin or Bishop Moore in him—I don't mean politically, of course, but in terms of personal appeal. (ibid)

Some of the harshest critiques of the production however, related to Alvin Epstein's portrayal of Pastor Manders as charming and humorous, which some critics found to be inappropriate. The Markers note however that in non-English productions, there was often a strain of humor to the character, but specifically in the English theater:

Pastor Manders has as a rule been treated as a caricature and an embarrassment by directors and audiences convinced that any laughter he may elicit is *prima facie* evidence of the quaintness of a hopelessly antiquated classic, rather than part of a dramaturgical design that consciously mingles humor and horror. (Marker 121)

Brustein is a scholar aware of the dramaturgical design of Ibsen's play, and he attempted to redefine the way Manders was often incorrectly perceived. Either the critics could not accept Brustein and Epstein's redefinition of the role which now was much more humorous, or Brustein was unable to effectively convey his vision of the character to the actor. Before I begin an analysis of Brustein's work with the actors I would like to discuss his second aim for the production, to find the poem in the play.

In *The Theatre of Revolt* Brustein discusses two kinds of ghosts in the play:

...an intellectual inheritance—the specters of beliefs which continue to prevail long after they have lost meaning and a spiritual inheritance—the spirits of the dead which inhabit the bodies of the living, controlling their lives and destinies. (*Revolt* 68)

In an interview prior to the start of rehearsals, Brustein indicated that the aim of his production was to underscore the ghost story element of the play.

I do think it has its mysteries, and I want to investigate those mysteries. I want to investigate the ghost story. *Ghosts* is first and foremost a ghost story. There are ghosts in that house. Not just ghosts of dead ideas—which have to do with the play of ideas—but the ghosts of Captain Alving, the ghost of Joanna, his mistress. It's a haunted house. (ART News 1982)

This idea of approaching the play as a ghost story and bringing the ghosts of Captain Alving and Joanna to life is a unique one, which is not done in any of the many famous or notable European productions that the Markers analyze. Furthermore, Brustein's approach to the ghostly and symbolic elements of the play was part of his advocacy and defense of a play that has often been dismissed as being an irrelevant social critique with an outdated illness at its no longer scandalous center.

His approach contrasted with that of Thomas Haas, the director of YRT's *When We Dead Awaken*, who according to Brustein struggled to find his own unique theatrical entry point to translating the theoretical *Theatre of Revolt*. Brustein found the poem in the play – its visual metaphor – in the concept of ghosts haunting a house.

As with *The Wild Duck*, Brustein relied heavily on the visual approach to find the “poem inside the play.” In this case it was contained in a gloomy and haunted atmosphere. The reviews of the production convey that Brustein was quite successful in establishing an eerie mood for the entire evening through the scenic elements, in collaboration with scenic designer Tony Straiges, costume designer Rita Ryack, and lighting designer James F. Ingalls. His strength as a director in general was in his work on the production's concept with his designers.

In contrast to Brustein's *The Wild Duck*, where the metaphor of photography and seeing was reflected boldly in the set itself, here the setting was a more traditionally straightforward rendering of Mrs. Alving's residence. In this instance, Brustein managed to successfully emphasize the poetic and ghostly elements of the play within the confines of a more traditional setting. The decision to be subtler in the design allowed the ghostly and poetic moments of his staging to stand out more. The critics noted the production's visual elements were particularly effective.

The play begins in a downpour, the rain running so relentlessly down the huge expanse of window in the back wall of the set that the large fjord and distant mountains in the background are barely visible. By act two, the overt precipitation has been replaced by a gloom that gradually lifts as the past tightens its stranglehold on the Alvings, mother and son. (Clay *Ghosts*)

Brustein furthered his “haunted house” concept by having the ghosts of Captain Alving and Joanna haunt Mrs. Alving's house:

The dining room, in particular, seems the domain of specters, disembodied shadows still fulfilling their bodily needs, so to speak—and clearly having a better time in death than say, Jacob Marley [a reference to the ghost in Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*]. In any case, Mrs. Alving sees them there; and so do we, in looming, undulating silhouette. (ibid)
In gigantic balletic silhouette Captain Alving copulates with the housekeeper Joanna. (Kelly *Ghosts*)

In several other moments in the play Brustein also had Captain Alving appear in the staircase behind a scrim on the side of the stage. He told me that he decided to employ the specters “not often but tellingly.” (Brustein) Furthermore, Brustein’s direction of the actors accentuated the non-naturalistic approach. “Brustein has given his actors movements that are often half-completed motions, creating an odd sense of distance between them. This blocking introduces an intentional awkwardness.” (Simmons)

In Brustein’s opinion, “the best moment of the production” (Brustein) was “In the end, as young Oswald suffers his sudden, debilitating syphilitic attack, there is an eerie, piercing sound, all the doors fly open, as if at some supernatural instigation, and the sun also rises.” (Clay *Ghosts*)

Brustein adds some more details about his staging of the end of the play:

There were many doors in this house, and at the end, as you know, Mrs. Alving is asked to make a choice about euthanasia. She has to kill someone she adores, loves more than anyone else, or to live with a son who is going through enormous torment before her eyes, who is going mad, who is asking for the sun. At the moment when he asks for the sun, the entire set turned brilliant white or yellow from the sun. Of course, the rain had stopped, the mist had cleared away, and the entire place just filled with sun. We opened up the scrim as well. You saw the entire skeleton of the house. You did not see the house, you saw its skeleton. And Mrs. Alving, at this point says in this terribly indecisive way, “Will I? Won’t I? Yes? No?” whether she’d give this poison to Oswald and put him out of his misery, and she puts her hand in her hair, the stage direction says, and emits this scream. And the scream was picked up by an electronic scream which extended it. And as that scream extended, and they were frozen, and everything went like negative on the stage, all the doors of the house opened. Blackout. (ISA 8-9)

It was a moment which those who saw the production found both chilling and thrilling and it embodied Brustein's interpretation of the play. "This closed play suddenly opens up. All the doors open. The truth is ultimately revealed through the open doors." (Brustein)

Brustein accomplished his goal of accentuating the ghostly elements of the play and expressing through his staging and adaptation Ibsen's poetic vision and the timelessness of its message, which is not about syphilis but about humanity's struggle with the ghosts of its past on all levels.

Brustein however admitted in our interview that his experiment was not a complete success. He conceded that sometimes his productions suffered and his ideas regarding the interpretation of the characters were not "totally realized... I was too engrossed with the concept and not enough with the acting which often happens to me as a director." (ibid) Kathleen Widdoes, who played Helene Alving, expressed that critique from her perspective as an actress in the production:

The preparation for *Ghosts*—this is my first Ibsen, by the way—wore me down. But maybe I better not say that [laughs]... I don't want to offend Robert [Brustein]. He is a wonderful director, so gentle, so easy, so clear and sure about what he wants. But we did spend *an awful lot of time* just sitting around talking about the play. Two whole weeks' worth. That's more than I'm used to I guess. I'm afraid of things being over analyzed, over-intellectualized. Sometimes I'm not sure. I mean, *for me*, acting only really happens when I'm doing it, when I'm performing. I can sit down and talk with another actor about this scene, that scene, this motivational possibility, but it's not the thing itself. There's a mystery to acting that goes beyond words. At least there is for me. I like talking about it *after* a performance. Then it has reality. (Kelly Widdoes)

Brustein confirmed for me what is clear from Widdoes's remarks. His favorite part of the process was working with the actors in the early part of rehearsal around the table, breaking down the play:

phrase by phrase, line by line, trying to find the intentions and the characterizations, consistent imagery...and see how that's revealed through the language and through the action. And that's what I would do around a table before we get on our feet and start blocking. So that's really the most fun, when we're annotating the play.... I love the table talk part of the evolution [of a production]. And then you get down to the hard work of trying to get actors to do

what you want them to do without them having knowing that you are pushing them around [*laughs*]. (Brustein)

Whatever his struggles are as a director, Brustein's description of his process encapsulates the director's challenge of taking theoretical ideas and working with actors to bring them to life on stage. It also underscores the rigor with which a director working with actors analyzes and interprets a dramatic text. It is a process with which many literature scholars are not familiar or comfortable. Brustein who had worked on dramatic texts both in academic settings and in the rehearsal room noted:

In criticism for example, when I do it with actors and we're sitting around a table, they have an imaginative approach that lay students don't. I mean they [lay students] can function intellectually very well, but actors bring emotion and imagination to it and can investigate character in a way which is very revealing to me, and it's always a terrific experience. (ibid)

Brustein's uniqueness is that he brings his academic life as a scholar and critic to his work in the theater, and he brings what he has learned in the theater to the world of academia.

Brustein's conception of *Ghosts* may not have been fully realized because of his challenges with the actors. However, his choice to have Helene's indecision culminate with a scream rather than in "speechless horror" (Fjelde 276) is a major one. It is an interpretation of the play that expands on his theoretical approach to the play in *The Theater of Revolt*, and it is in line with his tendency to interpret the endings of many Ibsen's plays such as *Brand*, *The Master Builder* and *When We Dead Awaken* as heroic transcendent moments. There is a profound sense of release in Brustein's staging choice, just as there was in his staging of *The Wild Duck*. That play ends with the sharp indictment of the living characters. While honoring the author's intent, Brustein's juxtaposed a final image of "the blue afterimage of a duck rising from the depth of the sea...suggest[ing] the transcendent release Hedvig found in death." (*Scenes* 267)

Similarly the choice to have Mrs. Alving's indecision culminate with a scream and all the doors flying open, rather than "speechless horror," does not clarify whether Helene gives Oswald his morphine. It does however imply her recognition, acceptance and release of the past – of the ghost haunting the house, and ultimately of the truth that is finally set free – exposed to the blinding light of the sun. Where Brustein could have made Mrs. Alving's scream a manifestation

of speechless horror and paralysis, he makes it ultimately into an act of expansion and release, all the while respecting Ibsen's ambiguity and uncertainty inherent in the end of the play.

The roots of Brustein's approach to the staging can be inferred in *The Theatre of Revolt* where he described *Ghosts* as "proceeding, like a detective story, by digging up evidence from the past, to a terrible and inevitable conclusion...that she [Mrs. Alving] is the culprit." (*Revolt* 67-9)

Brustein's comparison of *Ghosts* to *Oedipus* has its limits. Ibsen's play

lacks one Sophoclean essential: a fatalistic acceptance of human doom. Sophocles ascribes the destruction of his heroes to the will of the gods; Ibsen ascribes it to the stupidity and inhumanity of generation after generation of men. And so the implications of Ibsen's position are the very opposite of Greek fatalism: even his belief in determinism implies a belief in will. (ibid 70)

Brustein emphasizes in his staging of the play's ending the fact that Ibsen did not believe in the fatalistic acceptance of human doom. Rather, Ibsen believed in human responsibility, and Mrs. Alving comes to accept responsibility for her actions by the end of the play. Already in *The Theatre of Revolt* Brustein was attempting to limit the importance of determinism in the play. He qualifies the determinism as a manifestation of human will, of free will. Individuals have the will to change the course of their lives if they accept the past and move forward. In his analysis of the play in 1962 he already was trying to reinterpret it away from Miller's conception of Ibsen as a well-made playwright. His production, with the ghosts of the past literally haunting the present and his accentuation of the plays symbols, again questioned an exclusively naturalistic interpretation of the play.

This is of particular importance because between *Ibsen and Revolt* and the 1982 production of *Ghosts*, Brustein did not involve *Ghosts* in his subsequent theory on Ibsen besides for a passing reference. In his revision of "A Crack in the Chimney" in 1990 titled "Reimagining the Drama" however, he added an important reference to *Ghosts* that did not appear in the original version. He linked Ibsen's play and dramatic method to Sam Shepard's play *Buried Child*. Shepard, whom Brustein admires, writes in an Ibsenite tradition that is not Miller's interpretation of Ibsen:

The attempt to bring the family secret into the light is a process of exhumation, the same process that drives Ibsen's *Ghosts*, but in this case the process is literal...*Buried Child* [like *Ghosts*] takes the form of a self-accusation, rather than an indictment [of Miller's plays], in which guilt becomes the price we pay for

being alive. With Sam Shepard, the American theatre takes a step beyond the Newtonian universe into a world of dream, myth, and inner space. (*Reimagining* 29)

He reiterates this concept in “Theatre of Guilt” as well. Brustein had suggested 30 years earlier that the play owed a debt to determinism, but now, after having staged it, he reinterpreted it as being part of a tradition that was beyond the Newtonian and causal universe. Not only was Brustein able to express many of his feelings about the play through his staging, but the text also became clearer to him through the process. He gained insight into its meaning, and its greater relevance as a model for the direction the American theater should take.

ART would not stage another Ibsen production until Robert Wilson’s *When We Dead Awaken* in 1991. That production would implement Brustein’s ideas on Ibsen even further and more radically than before. By that time, Brustein would establish the Harvard/ART affiliated conservatory program called The Institute for Advanced Theatre Training. At the Institute, as at the Yale School of Drama, Brustein would introduce his interpretation of Ibsen to his students and it would inspire their own productions of Ibsen’s plays. In 1989 Slobodan Unkovski, a Macedonian director at ART, would produce a notable production of *Peer Gynt* with students from the Institute.

Part 5
When We Dead Awaken – ART 1991
Theatrical Visionaries Meet

When We Dead Awaken is not discussed in *Ibsen's Lively Art*. The book was published in 1989 and the rest of the productions discussed here took place in later years. However, the Markers' theory and approach is still useful in exploring the remaining productions. Joan Templeton's article "Ibsen Lite: Robert Wilson's *When We Dead Awaken*" references the Markers' book and essentially builds upon its approach in its discussion of Wilson's production. The major distinction is that Templeton's analysis of the production, as its title implies, is an attack on Wilson's approach and production. It is not a clear-eyed analysis of Wilson's methods. Her mistaken working assumption is that in contrast to auteurs such as Bergman, Zadek, Stein and Ostermeier, who in her opinion:

treat Ibsen's texts as works of significance and meaning and respond in kind with adaptations that intend to mean something as well. They seriously engage Ibsen's text to read it in new ways. In contrast, Wilson dismisses Ibsen's text as heavy and depressing, forces song-and-dance on it to "lighten it up", and cuts it to shreds to transform it to a melodrama that wavers uneasily between travesty and mystification. (Templeton 300)

It is odd that Templeton, who accepts the auteur approach and even praises such productions even when they fundamentally change the plots and meaning of Ibsen's plays, takes issue with Wilson's production whose text was adapted by Brustein, a respected scholar in his own right. Despite her assertions that Wilson's work is meaningless and that he shredded Ibsen's play, it is simply not true. Though Brustein reduced the text by half, it was done without "excising anything vital to the action, the characters, or the theme." (*Dead* 3)

Furthermore, Wilson's dreamlike aesthetic can be taken as the inheritor of techniques employed by Aurelien Lugné-Poë in late 19th century Paris, which are discussed by the Markers. Ibsen himself praised Lugné-Poë's work as resurrecting his play. (Marker 19) The purpose of this section then is not only to continue the exploration into how Brustein's theoretical views on Ibsen and his commitment to create a new American approach to Ibsen influenced production, but also to defend Wilson's approach as a continuation of Brustein's serious engagement with Ibsen by contextualizing it into Brustein's Ibsen oeuvre.

Robert Brustein previously connected Henrik Ibsen and the avant-garde director Robert Wilson through the very title of his 1977-8 essay “Theatre in the Age of Einstein: The Crack in the Chimney”. Einstein is in part a reference to Wilson’s seminal work *Einstein on the Beach* and the cracked chimney is, of course, a reference to Ibsen’s *The Master Builder*. Though Brustein’s section on *When We Dead Awaken* from *The Theatre of Revolt* was reprinted in the program for Robert Wilson’s production, the influence of Brustein’s theory manifests itself differently than it did in the previously discussed productions.

Robert Wilson’s production of *When We Dead Awaken* represents a case where Brustein’s theory is made manifest on stage through his choice of director and his collaboration with him. Wilson’s aesthetic embodies an element of Brustein’s approach to both Ibsen and theater. Brustein was the first to commission Wilson to direct a classical text with his ART production of Euripides’s *Alcestis* in 1986. He had previously invited Wilson to stage the American premiere of the Cologne section of his epic *the CIVIL warS: a tree is best measured when it is down* at ART in 1985, and Wilson staged Heiner Müller’s *Quartet* at ART in 1988. (Plotkin) Though Wilson was enormously popular in Europe and his work was known in New York, it was Brustein who introduced this major director to audiences outside New York.

Despite Brustein’s longstanding deep admiration for Wilson’s work, and Wilson’s connection to ART, it was not Brustein who came up with the idea of having Wilson direct *When We Dead Awaken*. Rather, it was one of his students. Brustein described how it came about:

I had just completed a lecture on Ibsen’s *When We Dead Awaken* in my Modern Drama class at Harvard when one of my students suggested that this rarely produced play might make an ideal project for Robert Wilson. The suggestion was not only apt but timely since Bob and I had been looking for something to do together ever since *Quartet* in 1988. (“New Weapons”, ART News Feb. 1991)

The student in his Modern Drama course, I discovered, was none other than Mary Sutton, a directing student at the Institute for Advanced Theatre Training whom I interviewed regarding her 1990 production of *Little Eyolf* at the Institute. She had also been the assistant director for Brustein’s production of Strindberg’s *The Father* in 1989-90. As she describes it: “I used to walk back to the theater with Brustein and I just said, ‘You got to have him do that piece.’ So he came

to me the next day and said, 'I called Robert Wilson and he's thinking about it.' And he followed through on it." (Mary Sutton)

Brustein described his phone conversation with Robert Wilson later that day: "When I described Ibsen's last play to Bob over a crackling long-distance line to Germany, he immediately agreed to direct it, though he hadn't yet read it." ("New Weapons") It is not at all surprising that Wilson agreed to direct the play solely based on a description of it. His process when directing texts is often to have someone synopsise the work for him as he sketches and takes notes. (Kate Whoriskey) Furthermore, Brustein's interpretation of the play as an image-laden non-realistic work surely captured Wilson's imagination. Wilson described his initial reaction to the play after Brustein approached him about it:

[I] was immediately drawn to it. It's a play that's strange, mysterious, and something we can't completely understand. There was something I just couldn't put my finger on. I don't like things I can understand. If I understand something, I don't want to do it. It doesn't interest me. (Robert Wilson interview with Gary Susman "Stuff")

His attraction to this Ibsen play, after Brustein described it to him, is in stark contrast to his general feeling about the Ibsen plays he was familiar with until that point. "I don't like most of Ibsen's plays, Ibsen usually explains too much." ("Wilson at ART") It is to Brustein's credit that he managed to describe Ibsen's work in terms that made an avant-garde director like Wilson, who normally was not attracted to Ibsen, eager to direct his plays.

Mary Sutton described to me why, after studying the play in Brustein's course, she thought that Robert Wilson should direct a production of *When We Dead Awaken*. "*Einstein on the Beach* was so influential for me in that the only person I could think of who could have done the latter plays, the last play of Ibsen to me – because it was, I wouldn't say chaotic, it was to me spiritual." (Mary Sutton) Like Brustein in "Theatre in the Age of Einstein: The Crack in the Chimney", she was deeply affected by Wilson's theatrical vision. They both saw the same potential in having Wilson direct an Ibsen play. For Brustein, Wilson was the epitome of a non-causal approach to Ibsen. "Robert Wilson was ideally suited for this because he can't think in a linear fashion. It's impossible for him. He thinks in terms of images." (Brustein)

Wilson's production, and its developmental workshop was videotaped for archival purposes and is available for viewing both at the Harvard Theatre Collection and the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center where I saw it. Because of Robert Wilson's international stature, it is also the most written about and reviewed of the Ibsen productions which Brustein produced. Brustein's influence on the production was twofold. He was the producer, and he also wrote the quite radically reduced adaptation for Wilson's production.

The most central element of theater for Wilson is light. (Holmberg, *Wilson* 121) The centrality of light to his conception of theater echoes Andre Antoine, the founder of Theatre Libre, the theater that staged the first productions of Ibsen in Paris, that light is "the life of the theater, the good fairy of the *décor*, the soul of the staging...Light acts physically on the audience: its magic accentuates, underlines, and marvelously accompanies the inner meaning of a dramatists work." (Marker 93) Robert Wilson is an auteur visual director, who until the mid-1980s used little to no text in his work. ART's Literary Director Robert Scanlan recalled that

Wilson over and over wished that he could do the play without text at all. His instinct with *When We Dead Awaken* has been to express this work through massive elemental forms—the mountains in each of the three acts, the water of the sea in the first act, and the water of the mountain brook in the second act, the snowstorm which 'whites out' the finale of the play—and minimize the play's dependence on words. The play does not strike Wilson to be about what people say. (ART News Feb. 1991 6)

Brustein wanted to give this avant-garde director who normally did not care for text another opportunity to direct another classic text, and he insisted that Wilson challenge himself by using Ibsen's text. He created for Wilson an adaptation. As Brustein describes in the introduction to the published version, the adaptation incorporated preliminary cuts made by the director and honored Wilson's dislike of the 'ping pong' of conventional dialogue. He prefers his actors focus on their lines and not on the need to respond to the other actor in the scene. Brustein's adaptation "set about rendering Ibsen's strange, occasionally verbose play into a kind of suggestive English I hoped might spark Wilson's imagistic imagination." ("New Weapons") His final version was half the length of the original, without "excising anything vital to the action, the characters, or the theme." (*Dead* 3)

Far from completely dismissing Ibsen's text, as Templeton asserts, when they began work on the adaptation Wilson requested "language that evolved from modern to archaic as Irene and Rubek gradually ascend the mountain." ("New Weapons") But Brustein worried that it would confuse the audience too much. They finally decided upon a non-idiomatic contemporary, terse, clipped style for Maja and Ulfheim, and a more formal language for Rubek and Irene. (ibid)

In rehearsal, Wilson made further cuts. Brustein explains that he wanted to cut "the line 'When we dead awaken, what? We discover that we never lived.' A very important line. He did not want the title in the play. I [Brustein] fought him hard on this, and I managed to get a compromise which left most of it in." (ISA 6) The title appeared both in bold multicolored lettering on the white stage curtain and it became a song-and-dance knee play performed by the cast. Brustein defended his adaptation, "It is our hope that those familiar with the play will tolerate the loss of some of its fatty tissue in return for what we expect will be a deep penetration of its spirit." ("New Weapons") To use Brustein's terminology, the poem Wilson found inside the play was expressed through the massive elemental forms, through light and the way he choreographed the actors which often created a subtext to their words.

Wilson did reinstate one of Brustein's initial cuts which became a taped refrain at various points in the play. The adaptation was done in rehearsal by Robert Scanlan:

Although absolutely nothing happened
I knew that we had crossed the border,
That we were really home again,
Because it stopped at every little station,
No one got off and no one got on,
But the train stood there silently,
For what seemed like hours.
At every station I heard two railmen
Walking along the platform—
One of them carrying a lantern—
And they mumbled quietly to each other
In the night, without expression or meaning,
There are always two men talking
About nothing at all. (*Dead 4*)

He found this particular excerpt to be mysterious and poetic. Its mystery was amplified as Wilson inserted it at various points in the play. His focus on this text lends insight into what attracted Wilson to *When We Dead Awaken* in the first place. Throughout his oeuvre, Wilson has

had a penchant for train imagery, an interest in silence, and a lack of interest in words. *Einstein on the Beach* has a train scene at the beginning of the play. “A huge locomotive cutout, manned by an engineer with a pipe, inches forward, disappears in a blackout, then appears a little further forward, always preceded by billows of smoke.” (*Critical Moments* 120)

This section is about silence, which is very important to Wilson. Furthermore, he is a director who is known for not liking text or the ‘ping pong’ of dialogue. In terms of form, this is an excerpt from the play which was originally a dialogue between Maja and Rubek and had been adapted into monologue form. In terms of content, it’s an expression of a world in which speech is not the primary mode of communication. “I heard two railmen/ Walking along the platform” emphasizes that speech is not of primary importance. It is the sound of walking which is initially heard and noted. When they finally speak, they ‘mumble quietly without meaning’. The dreamlike quality of the play, this scene, and Wilson’s work in general is underscored in this text. Maja thought Rubek was asleep (in the realm of dreams) on the train, but he was hearing the silence around him. This Ibsen text can be understood as an expression of Wilson’s theatrical aesthetic, and his choice to reinstate the text during the workshop process opens a window into his work methods.

The production process for a Wilson work is a long one. There were two workshops which preceded rehearsal. They were written about in the February 1991 edition of “ART News” that was sent to subscribers in conjunction with the play’s opening. Examining the workshops will provide further insight into Wilson’s work methods and his approach to the material. It will shed light on both Wilson’s deeply instinctual auteur approach to Ibsen’s play and the rigorous engagement with Ibsen which Wilson and his collaborators at ART partook in developing the piece – countering Templeton’s claim that Wilson did not treat Ibsen’s text as a work “of significance and meaning” and that he did not “seriously engage Ibsen’s text to read it in new ways.” (Templeton)

The first workshop took place over five days in July 1990 and focused on developing the design concept of the show and the visual storytelling. It began with the production team sitting in Robert Brustein’s office “reading the script several times, stopping whenever anyone had a question, a thought, or a visual association to offer. While we read, Bob sketched [which is his method of taking notes].” (Abbie Katz) As designer John Conklin notes:

We discussed Ibsen's life, personality, and a wide range of topics—the conversation veered from Brecht to Beckett to World War I. Bob Wilson listened, absorbed, and then drew and drew and drew. Bob thinks with his hands, a pencil, and a blank sheet of paper. Ideas, dreams, images, furniture, skies, mountains, trees, water, and an avalanche all emerged. (John Conklin)

By the second day Wilson and Conklin were requesting visual and literary sources based on the previous day's discussion. "The office walls are covered with pictures and images—the Grand Canyon, Ibsen walking the streets of Oslo, an Alpine hut, mountains and glaciers in Greenland, Gustave Dore's illustrations for Dante's *Inferno*." (ibid) Institute dramaturgy student Dorthee Hannappel provides an example of the impact Dore's illustrations had on Wilson's designs. "One of these engravings particularly intrigued Wilson while he was sketching several versions of a stone chair [which Rubek sits on] in the second act. The picture shows a steep, tall rocky cliff. Looking at it carefully, Wilson transformed the shape of the cliff into the shape of the stone chair he was working on." (Hannappel 12)

ART Literary Manager Robert Scanlan affords further insight into how references to Dante influenced the production.

The play is from beginning to end an exploration of this agonizing responsibility between men and women [referring to Rubek's suppressing his desire for Irene to create his art at a great cost to her]. The climactic scene of the second act, which amounts to a ritualistic act of contrition on Rubek's part, is eerily parallel to the climax of Dante's *Purgatorio* where the betrayed Beatrice upbraids the poet before he is immersed by a figure of mercy in the soothing waters of Lethe, which let him forget the shame of his inconstant past, and the hurt he has caused the woman who most inspired his artistry. Ibsen is not known to have been a reader of Dante, but his last play, sublime and quasi-mythical as it is, strikes analogical chords with several "late" works by the greatest artists. The sweeping retrospect of Shakespeare's late Romances...Beethoven's last quartets...They are all works 'near the silence,' as Joyce boldly put it. (Scanlan, ibid, February 1991)

Not only do Conklin and Scanlan's remarks provide a greater sense of the scope of the visual and textual references that were discussed in the workshop, but by linking *When We Dead Awaken* to both Shakespeare's late Romances and more notably Beethoven's late quartets, Scanlan was also underscoring the influence of Brustein's theory. But in contrast to the YRT production where Brustein felt the director Tom Haas had read his theory too literally, Wilson had his own unique distinct aesthetic through which to filter Brustein's theory and script adaptation.

After compiling numerous visual and literary reference points, Scanlan and Conklin each mapped out a breakdown of the “scenes and emotional movements of the play” (Katz) from their respective perspectives of dramaturgy and design. Scanlan used a technique he calls a ‘plot-bead diagram’ a visual method of script analysis, to plot out on paper the action of the play. Each scene is indicated by a circle, inside which the action of the scene is listed. The circles are of different sizes depending on the scene’s importance, and squares list entrances and exits of characters and other action occurring on stage.

The director Kate Whoriskey, who studied with Scanlan at ART and uses this method as well, explained to me the benefit of the diagram. It lays out the movement of the play as a whole, and each scene in particular, in a clear visual fashion so that the play’s action is clear and important moments are built up rather than being passed over or overwhelmed by the sheer length of a scene. Having watched the video of Wilson’s *When We Dead Awaken*, I can attest to the clarity of the storytelling. Regardless of one’s opinions on Wilson’s aesthetic and his and Brustein’s treatment of the text, the important moments and the relationships between the characters were lucid.

Each day Wilson and Conklin would work together, with Conklin building every possible design Wilson sketched. Lighting designer Steve Strawbridge used a few lights with colored gels to provide a sense of a lighted set. Conklin would work and:

What begins to emerge is a series of dream-like evocations of Ibsen’s brooding world of the mountains of Norway—rendered principally in black, white and gray. They become the essence of the psychological drama of the play, not an illustration of it. Bob creates an alternate reality—vision and movement divorced from surface narration. He uses juxtaposition and irony to liberate the text from its weight and density. He returns over and over to the creation of a sense of lightness in all its senses—the elegance and refinement of gesture; one perfect placement of an object or an actor to clarify and emphasize a moment; one studied opposition of dark and light. So this last, symbolic, heavy dream of Ibsen about failure, frustration, death, and resurrection will have a show curtain in bright vivid colors—red, blue, yellow letters striding and dancing across a pure white background. (Conklin)

It is noteworthy that Conklin discusses “the psychological drama of the play” in relation to Wilson’s design for the production. Wilson is known for his anti-naturalistic aesthetic which is

not concerned with psychology, at least not in the conventional sense. But in Conklin's opinion, Wilson does deal with the psychological drama on his own terms through the visual world he creates rather than by working with the actors.

What Templeton chooses to ignore in her analysis of Wilson's production is that the specific physical world and visual world Wilson creates becomes part of his play text. In Wilson's visual theater the text becomes an equal among the other storytelling design elements. Is he thus weakening the role of text in the theater, or as Templeton would have us believe, undermining Ibsen? As Conklin understands it, Wilson is simply choosing alternative modes to tell the story – modes which perhaps honor the mystery of Ibsen's creation more than a naturalistic approach would.

By the final day of the workshop Robert Wilson and his collaborators had a "clear outline of the set that Bob envisioned for the production." (Katz)

The second workshop occurred over two weeks in October of 1990, during which Wilson worked with the entire cast and developed the staging. In addition, the designers were present to see how the staging would affect their designs. As alluded to above, Wilson's work with actors is very different from a conventional rehearsal process:

Normally actors start by talking about character and motivation; discussing what is going on in the play as preparation for rehearsals where development of relationships and the telling of the story are the primary objective. With Wilson, none of this takes place. Actors are told where to go, what to do (this includes unexplained gestures and poses), and when to speak (usually uninflected in early rehearsals). Wilson also told the actors, 'I'm not the type of director who is interested in psychology. Knowing where you are going, that's the main thing. Keep it very simple. Beneath it all it can be very complicated, but let theatre always be about *one thing* and keep that very simple.' ("Wilson: The Actor's View")

Essentially Wilson's movement score creates a mask for the actors that is rigidly set and quite complicated to master, although it keeps things "simple". On top of this score Wilson layers on the text at specific moments

Actors must take extensive notes on their timing of the text to movement. No explanations are given about what any of these things may mean. Wilson likes, in early rehearsals, to explore what he calls 'the tensions and the structure of the

space.’ He likes to start early because, as he says: ‘The visual book should be able to stand on its own. Space is texture and structure—something that can’t be talked about’... Wilson has said that a line of text should not interrupt the silence and that ‘when you finish a line, it doesn’t end, it continues into silence.’ (ibid)

Ibsen’s play begins with a conversation between Maja and Rubek about hearing silence and Wilson through his direction, and Brustein through his adaptation, honors the silence.

Once the actors have learned the choreography and where to say their lines they can fill the rigid form he has provided them – as Wilson implied, “Beneath it all it can be very complicated.” There is great freedom within this structure. Wilson is not interested in why the actors do what they do; he just wants them to do it. “I don’t want to know why I’m doing something. That’s why my theater is different, noninterpretive. Interpretation is for the audience.” (Hafrey) To an extent the experience the actors have working on the piece is similar to Wilson’s aim for the audience’s experience. “He talks about giving the audience literal and mental space within the theatre piece to fill with their consciousness and feeling.” (Conkin)

Trusting Wilson’s method was not always easy for the actors. In the stage manager’s production book for the actual production I found a note to the actors that they must fully commit to Wilson’s non-naturalistic style and trust that it will work if they do. The note reprimanded the actors, saying that it only looked bad when they do *not* fully commit to his style. (Stage Manager’s Production Book, *When We Dead Awaken* 1991)

The second workshop ended with a *Bauprobe*, the building of a full-size mock-up of the set, which is rarely done in the United States. It is an example of how Wilson and ART introduced European production methods to the American theater. The *Bauprobe* allowed Wilson and his designers to see how Wilson’s set would work in the actual space and to make adjustments, discuss props, etc. Having the actors there as well allowed the lighting designer to work with Wilson on the lighting before the start of rehearsals. This was a huge benefit considering that lighting is, for Wilson, the most important element and the cues in his production are always painstakingly detailed and precise. The two workshops allowed Wilson and his company to have much of the intricate elements of his design and staging ready so that the relatively short rehearsal period was sufficient time for the production to open on schedule.

Despite the fact that Templeton admires Bergman's "Strindbergian" (Templeton 298) production of Ibsen, including *Ghosts* with textual interpolations from *The Pelican* and *A Ghost Sonata* (ibid), as well as the various German radical deconstructions of Ibsen which play fast and loose with Ibsen's text and plotting, she is indignant that Wilson incorporated "knee plays", a vaudevillian signature of all his productions, into *When We Dead Awaken*. The knee plays were created by Charles "Honi" Coles, a legendary tap dancer and blues singer/songwriter whom Wilson cast in the role of The Manager of the Spa. A 'knee play' is Wilson's term for short vaudevillian routines which he uses in his work to introduce each act. They serve, for him, as joints linking the show together, and function either as a commentary or in counterpoint to the tone of the play. The program breaks down the show as such: Knee Play, Act 1, Knee Play, Act I (Part 1), Intermission, Act II (Part 2), Knee Play, Act III.

During the knee plays, the intermission, and before the start of the show, there was a white curtain onstage with the words "When We Dead Awaken" written across it in bold colors as if by hand in crayon. In the first knee play, Charles "Honi" Coles came onstage and sang a song which begins:

I was alone when I met her
Now I wish I was alone.
I wasn't doing so bad
But she came along and now
 everything is wrong
I met her and I wish I never had. (Stage Manager's Production Book)

As Coles, sitting in a yellow chair and dressed in a white suit sang a song which resonated with the act's theme, Joan Templeton writes that "Stephanie Roth, who played Maja, appeared in a glittering one-piece bathing suit, high heels, and one long red glove to do a Betty-Grable-from-behind cheesecake number." (Templeton 287) Templeton, in her mocking tone, makes her disdain for the knee play clear. According to the program though, Templeton has gotten her facts wrong. It is Elzbieta Czyzewska, who plays the first Irene [Wilson had two actresses play the part], who appears in the routine. But despite Templeton's derisiveness for Czyzewska and Cole's knee play, Wilson is honoring that element of the character's history through this knee play. It makes complete sense that Irene would be performing in such a number. She says later in

the play, “I worked in nightclubs” (*Dead 25*) Instead of proving Wilson’s disregard for Ibsen’s text, the knee play underscores Wilson’s deep understanding of it.

It’s understandable though that Templeton would think it was the actress playing Maja in the number, because in Wilson’s production

a third character [besides Rubek and Irene] becomes equally, if not more, central: Maja...becomes the only truly living spirit onstage, often appearing to control events, even entering at one point with an electronic box that makes the set pieces move... [whereas the other characters are] unable to transcend their pallid and sedentary states. (Kalb)

Kalb argues that, not only is Wilson’s production a serious consideration of Ibsen’s play, it is also contains a serious exploration of a character which is often overshadowed.

In the second knee play the lights came back up and the white *When We Dead Awaken* show curtain was down. Rubek and Charles “Honi” Coles sang a song:

Did it, So what. We fell in love.
We did it, So what. We fell in love.
Who am I to question fate, ‘spose I
Ain’t acting nice.
I had no time to hesitate
I’m a victim of
The big brown eyes... (Stage Manager’s book script)

Eventually the entire cast joined in and the song evolved into a tap number. They sang “Yes, we fell in love, yes we fell in love, yes we fell in *When We Dead Awaken*” and they repeat “*When We Dead Awaken*” as they shuffled off stage. While Templeton interprets this scene in particular, and Wilson’s production in general as Wilson mocking Ibsen, critic Jonathan Kalb interprets the knee plays very differently:

Wilson took his biggest risk in inserting three vaudevillesque knee plays, each of which diffuses the built-up heaviness...In the end, though, it seems thoroughly justified, not only because of Wilson’s earnestness, the fact that he declined to undercut or mock Ibsen. It’s as if he saw this as a play about love and simply wanted to direct it that way. (Kalb)

Act three was preceded by the final knee play. In this one, Sheryl Sutton, who played the shadow-like second Irene, was in a bathrobe smoking on the side of the stage as Honi Coles

gradually walked to a metal hospital bed in front of the “When We Dead Awaken” curtain as he sang a mournful blues song.

According to the poets who write such things
It's the only thing worth living for
But unless you've lived it, felt its misery, joy
You can't understand L-O-V-E, the doggonest feeling ever. (Templeton 292)

Wilson maintained the theme of love established earlier, but endowed it with a more serious, mournful tone, foreshadowing death in the final act.

Templeton is so taken by the idea of Wilson being a visual director who is not interested in text as to ignore evidence indicating that he was seriously engaging Ibsen's play. She describes the production as being “the haphazard in the service of the whatever”, but as I watched the archival video and read the reviews I found that despite her claims to the contrary, not only does Wilson meaningfully engage with Ibsen, his anti- naturalistic aesthetic honors Ibsen's characters and story, and sheds light on them as well.

I have analyzed the rigorous process through which the production was developed, as well as the use of knee plays and their connection to the action, theme, and characters in the play. I would now like to describe the production itself using reviews, Templeton's own detailed descriptions, Laurence Romero's article “Morbid Games in *When We Dead Awaken*,” and my own impressions for watching the video. I will mostly rely on the descriptions of the reviewers and scholars who witnessed the production firsthand. I will provide my own supplementary information where there description is incomplete. The goal is not only to give a sense of the production and how Wilson found the poem in the play, but also to highlight his engagement with Ibsen's words through noteworthy interpretative moments in his staging. Templeton either neglects these moments completely, or criticizes them.

Once the first knee play ended, the curtain rose to the sound of a windswept storm (by sound designer Hans Peter Kuhn). “A luminous deep blue sky, like dense opaque glass, a signature Wilson phenomenon, filled backstage right; backstage left, a gigantic looming black

mountain split the space diagonally. A pavilion made of steel tubes lit from inside with neon represented the spa building.” (Templeton 287) Rubek and Maja sat on two high-backed automated chairs which moved around according to the growing chasm in their relationship. The spa setting was “a cracked earth wasteland, in the background we hear crashing waves.” (Gussow)

Maja, played by Stephanie Roth, wore a red dress and Rubek, played by Alvin Epstein, wore a grayish suit. He had white hair and a short beard. Wilson had them not look at one another during the scene, further emphasizing their failure to connect. Their speech was often stylized. In the first scene, Maja had a serpent like manner. She spoke the word “houssssse” extending the “s” which Rubek eventually began mimicking as well. Their movements and speech throughout the production were often highly stylized and choreographed, creating juxtapositions between words, movements, and meaning.

The previously discussed train monologue was initially staged with Maja and Rubek “stage front, and their heads spotlighted as the audience heard a voice-over of Epstein reading the passage.” (Templeton 290) On stage, Rubek would emphasize certain lines from the voice-over by repeating them live.

After Maja accuses Rubek of shattering the promises he made to her when they married and he asks her, “Have I offended the Frau Professor?” (*Dead* 16) the Guests of the Spa arrive. Maja begins repeating the train monologue. Wilson staged the spa guests as “seven veiled women...dressed identically in the same sort of floor-length Victorian dress, [who] crossed the stage in a trancelike motion, repeating the monologue.” (Templeton 291) A glass shattered, reflecting Rubek’s broken promises. Everyone froze and then the guests whispered the monologue with Maja repeating certain lines. Only at the end of this scene did Maja reply to Rubek’s original question, ‘No, not a bit.’” (*Dead* *ibid*) In this way, Wilson got rid of the ‘ping pong’ of dialogue which he so dislikes. It underscored the lack of connection between Maja and Rubek and foreshadowed and accentuated the eeriness of Irene’s imminent arrival to the scene.

In the subsequent scene, the Hotel Manager played by Charles “Honi” Coles arrived, and Rubek asked about a guest he saw outside the previous night who was followed by “another

figure. Very dark. Like a shadow.” (*Dead* 18) Wilson replaced the nun who follows Irene with a second Irene. Elzbieta Czyzewska played the first Irene, and Sheryl Sutton, a longtime associate of Robert Wilson, played the shadow-like double Irene. She was, as Laurence Romero explains

a kind of Doppelgänger who shares her speech either in simultaneous utterances, in voice-overs, or in repetitions of certain lines, especially those condemning Rubek. Where in Ibsen’s original script Irene hates the nun who seems to harass her, in the Robert Wilson variation she is simple Irene’s Other, compatible in every way. (Romero 69)

As they discussed the woman in white, the two Irene’s entered upstage. The four figures (Maja, Irene’s, Rubek) began a silent gesture dialogue. Maja gestured stabbing the first Irene. Irene emitted a silent scream. Rubek put his hands to his face. Second Irene joined into their dance-like gesture dialogue as well. This non-verbal conversation articulated the relationship between Ibsen’s characters and their feelings toward one another. Finally Maja broke out of her trance, sat down, and the Spa Manager resumed the play text, discussing the mysterious woman Rubek had seen the night before.

Ulfheim, played by Mario Arrambide, entered as if holding unseen dogs by a leash followed by the recorded sound of dogs barking. But this was no ordinary Ulfheim. Wilson had conceived him as part man, part satyr with one satyr-like hoof, his face covered in white kabuki-like makeup with a shock of black cutting through it, his big hair greased. This Ulfheim spoke with an American southern accent and wore a green leather coat which exposes much of his chest. Wilson and Conklin were clearly inspired in their conception of the character by how Ibsen has Maja describe in the third act, when she calls him a satyr.

Ulfheim’s behavior was overtly sexual, bringing the subtext to the surface. Wilson had him thrust his hips as he said to Maja, “Your husband and me both like working with hard stuff.” (*Dead* 21) When Maja asked him if he was “going up to hunt in the woods now” (ibid) he replied by panting, before saying “I’m going right up to the top of the mountains...” (ibid) Lastly, Wilson had Ulfheim make a sexual gesture with his hand on the word ‘mountain’ when he told Maja “And then we can talk some more about our trip to the mountains” (ibid 23) His behavior came across as comically crude rather than seductive. Many reviews found him comedic.

As Ulfheim and Maja exited to the sound of a wind storm, Irene entered to drink her “glass of milk which was tinted with a mysterious green light.” (Templeton *ibid*) As she revealed to Rubek that she was dead, she dropped her glass as the other Irene did a series of gestures and completed her other half’s sentences.

Irene’s monologue about her death – “I was dead for many years. They came and bound me. They strapped my arms together behind my back. They lowered me into a tomb, with iron bars and padded walls. No one was allowed to hear my shrieks from the grave.” (*Dead* 27) – was a prerecorded voice-over which repeated when the other Irene kicked. By having it pre-recorded, Wilson underscored even further the spectral nature of Irene. When Irene told Rubek to go up to the mountain to meet her one more time, Wilson choreographed her to embrace him from behind, straddling him as the other Irene laughs maniacally, implying Irene’s death wish for Rubek.

Maja entered telling Rubek of her desire to go up the mountain with Ulfheim. In her hand she carried a blue orb. It was the electronic box referred to earlier in this chapter, which allows her to control the scenery, namely the chair. By creating a situation in which she was now in control of the space, Wilson reinforced the sense that Maja was taking back control of her life. The act ended with Irene’s indictment of Rubek. Wilson had the Irene repeat the word ‘died’ several times in Irene’s line “I became empty. Soulless. And it is why I died Arnold” (*ibid* 31) as she screamed – followed by the overwhelming sound of a storm, and then a blackout.

The setting for Act Two is “partway up the mountain, with its two large faces looming in the background. Between the two opaque masses is a narrow canyon of bright light.” (Romero, 75) Kelly explains that “In Wilson’s sparse but brilliant pictorial display, the action moves towards its symbolic peak, Rubek seated high in a throne-like sweep of earth and tormented first by Maja, playful at the edge of [blue] light bisecting the stage as water, then by Irene and her second self. Maja sings of freedom...” (Kelly, *When We Dead Awaken*)

On stage right there was a rock with a spear piecing it. Maja in this scene was dressed in a black pants, white shirt, and black tie. She wielded a spear-like alpenstock in her hands. During her scene with Rubek, she performed choreography which seemed to be inspired by Asian or Indian dance, as well as expressing the physicality which is evident in Ibsen’s own stage directions. Rubek also used a few choreographed gestures, but they were not as free as Maja’s dance. Her speech was highly stylized, alternating between a high pitch and a growl, as she

discussed her plan to leave with Ulfheim. “In a haunting, Dada-esque gesture, Maja removes a shoe and sends it floating down a stream, represented as a beam of cool blue light.” (Jan Stuart 45) Presumably the shoe floating down the river was linked to Rubek dropping leaves in the river later in the act.

As was usual in this production, there was a strong contrast between what Maja said and did and it functioned to great effect. As she hopped on one foot “declaring in neutral tones that she doesn’t know how to talk about art, she moves so gracefully it becomes ambiguous whether her words are sarcastic.” (Kalb) Laurence Romero analyzes the relationship between words and movement in this scene even further.

While Rubek pontificates to his young wife from a high throne of brown ashen rock...Maja cavorts inattentively, creating small dances, becoming her own artist as she liberates herself from the suffocating pseudo-artist. In their distractive frivolity, Maja’s dance movements destroy conventional dialogic codes, create her own new language that radically subverts Rubek’s speech and exposes it for what it is: vapid, hypocritical, self-serving...[it] is an act of liberation: Maja frees herself from Rubek’s death throes, ‘to live—for once’. [Later in the Act 2] After ‘being awake’ once more, she sings her own ditty, ‘I am free, I am free, I am free.’ (Romero 73-4)

Wilson expressed Maja’s liberation visually by having the lights come up on the other bank of the river as she crosses into freedom. Templeton, in contrast, interprets Wilson’s staging as making a mockery of Ibsen: “Maja’s wish to be free was apparently designed to be delivered as a parody of feminism.” (Templeton 292) It is particularly striking that Templeton, a scholar who celebrates what she considers Ibsen’s feminist tendency, does not appreciate what Kalb described in his review as the centrality and power Wilson gave Maja in his production.

Throughout the scene the sound of running water combined with a repeating piano melody. When the Irenes entered, steam rose from the stage as they lie down on the ground again, adding to the spectral quality of the character. Maja exited.

Wilson decided to place an intermission at this point in the act, perhaps to build the tension of the confrontation between Rubek and the Irenes. The confrontation was staged by Wilson so that eventually the two Irenes and Rubek were lying on their backs after Rubek traverses the river to meet them. In the sections where Irene is supposed to draw a knife, Irene

removed the alpenstock-spear from the rock on stage and her shadow raised a knife. Pre-recorded clanging industrial sounds interspersed with their conversation, underscored further with a bass melodic line. Again, Templeton suspects that this choice of sound environment was selected to “render incomprehensible” the scene. However, I was able to understand what was going on when watching the archival video. The metal clanging sounds can be associated with the metal objects which the Irenes wield in their hands to kill Rubek.

The third act curtain rose to reveal “a gigantic mountain background with Ulfheim’s rustic cabin in front of it.” (*Dead* 6) “The breaking dawn was represented by strong, brilliant light.” (Templeton 293) For their argument scene on the mountain, Maja was dressed in a green tracksuit to match Ulfheim’s green leather coat, and Ulfheim wore a sneaker on his normal foot. Their costumes for this scene were the most contemporary in the production. As he asked her if she would like to come into his hunting lodge, he made a sexual gesture with his tongue, again making what was hardly sub-textual explicit. When Maja described to Ulfheim her entrapment with Rubek, “She ended up shut up in a cold, clammy cage...” (*Dead* 59) she emitted a maniacal laugh. Wilson had her lock her arms behind her back as if she were in a straitjacket, providing a specific metaphor for her entrapment and its cost to her.

It began to snow on stage and the sound came on of the wind picking up as they planned their descent. Rubek and the Irenes appeared. Rubek was costumed in a white tuxedo and tails, and the first Irene was in an evening dress. Wilson and Conklin dressed Rubek and the first Irene to resemble an older couple on their wedding day. They made manifest in this costume choice Rubek’s line “There we will have our marriage feast, Irene my darling one” (ibid 66) which is an idea that Brustein had emphasized in his interpretation of the play in *The Theatre of Revolt*. (*Revolt* 82) In this interpretation, their death in the avalanche was a union in death, as Maja and Rubek headed down towards safety.

Brustein was very critical of the staging of the avalanche scene in Tom Haas’s production, in which a white cloth dropped from above covering the stage as a late Beethoven quartet accompanied it. Haas’s finale, despite this critique, was memorable to those who saw it even many years later. Wilson, on the other hand, staged the avalanche by having a scrim come down, a loud storm sound as well as a high pitched noise. There were “a series of falling squibs,

like stars dropping from the sky, followed by Rubek and the two Irenes [with arms raised heavenwards] descending beneath the stage on an elevator, as the white ground cloth was sucked down with them.” (*Dead* 5) Romero interprets Wilson’s staging of the ending in a unique fashion.

They proceed upwards towards the summit but are soon overcome, not by an avalanche as in the original, but, amidst an ear-splitting noise – nature’s voice – they are swallowed up by the same ‘earth’s crust’ that had entrapped Rubek from the start: nature’s final vengeance on false culture. With the end of their morbid games, the *huis clos* vanishes. What remains at the end in dazzling light is a magnificent ancestral landscape strewn with the scree of beautiful rock, unsullied by the hands of the false artist/sculptor. At the center, a small hopeful trace of culture: the graceful stylized ruin of a simple mountain hut. And silence. The mendacities of the false destroy the ancient pact of Genesis that bound the Word to the righteousness of God. In its place, within a spectacle of nature triumphant, a new Genesis: In the beginning was a Vision. (Romero 75)

By not interpreting the final moments of the production as an avalanche – perhaps a disappointingly staged avalanche – Romero provides a new way to understand the final moments of Wilson’s production. It illuminates many of the play’s themes and by focusing on sound, underscores Wilson’s interest in silence.

There was a wide spectrum of reactions to Wilson’s staging, from those critics who thought it was brilliant, to those who thought it was a brilliant failure and everything in between. Joan Templeton is not a fan of Wilson’s work on Ibsen because she feels he does not like or understand text, and therefore his aim must be to undermine Ibsen and make a parody of it. Regardless if one appreciates or enjoys Wilson’s work, from the above discussion and analysis of the rigorous process and collaboration between Wilson, Brustein, Conklin, Scanlan, and the rest of the production team, it is evident that there was a serious attempt by everyone involved to explore Ibsen’s work via the lens of a specific visual theater aesthetic.

ART’s *When We Dead Awaken* is the embodiment of the idea that Brustein’s theaters served as a laboratory to explore Ibsen through his modernist aesthetic. Brustein brought together a play he had written about, which held an important place in his understanding of Ibsen, and a director whom he believed held an important place in contemporary theater. In this laboratory,

he brought the two elements together to see what the result would be. “The ART production of *When We Dead Awaken* represents a meeting of minds, or rather imaginations, between a great 19th Century playwright, and one of the 20th Century’s most visionary auteurs.” (Brustein, ART Program note)

Not only was the result one of the major Ibsen productions of its period, it began Robert Wilson’s engagement with Ibsen. Wilson had said that he did not like most Ibsen plays, because he explains too much. After encountering Robert Brustein’s interpretation of Ibsen which emphasizes the poetic and non-realistic elements in Ibsen’s work, Wilson has gone on to direct productions of *Lady from the Sea* and *Peer Gynt*.

Part 6
Hedda Gabler – ART
A Straightforward rendering?
Hedda's hidden poem

Adrian Hall's production of *Hedda Gabler* has been described by Robert Brustein as, "a much more straightforward rendering of the play than any Ibsen we have ever done." (ISA 8) Both Hall's *Hedda Gabler* in 1992 and François Rochaix's *The Wild Duck* in 1996 are "straightforward renderings" of the plays in the sense that they were set in their original period, with ostensibly tradition staging and design. Neither director took an auteur approach with the material. Yet, in the following two sections I aim to question Brustein's assertion and will argue that each production, in its own way sought to find the poem within the play in a more subtle fashion and honors Brustein's commitment to develop an American tradition of exploring Ibsen's poetic depth, which had existed in Europe for decades.

Frederick J. and Lise-Lone Marker's analysis of *Hedda Gabler* productions highlights Vsevolod Meyerhold's experimental 1906 St. Petersburg production which aimed to "create a charged, allusive image of this spirit on the stage, rather than an allegedly exact and complete reproduction of life...to give primitive, purified expression to what it senses behind Ibsen's play." (Marker 63; 174) The Markers categorize Meyerhold's experimentation in the same vein as Craig and Reinhardt's work the same year. I will argue that though by today's standards Hall's production seems quite traditional; on closer investigation its connection to those early experimentations is evident. It does though stand in contrast to Bergman's productions of *Hedda Gabler* which the Markers analyze in depth. Bergman approached Hedda's suicide as a foregone conclusion. The goal of his production was to analyze the steps that lead to it. As I will discuss, Hall had a less deterministic interpretation of the material.

Hedda Gabler is a play about which Brustein has written very little. In *The Theatre of Revolt* he describes it as Ibsen's return to the "Classical form of *Ghosts*. Once again, a dead person determines the actions and characters of the play (General Gabler in *Hedda*...) and once again the rebel is treated with equivocal sympathy...Hedda is a Romantic contrast to the bourgeois mediocrities whose lives she helps destroy." (*Revolt* 74) Brustein categorizes the work

as one of Ibsen's transitional plays, bridging between his works that critique society and his last plays which turn inwards with their subjective, non-realistic exploration of the soul.

Hall's production holds a similar transitional place in the collected productions of Ibsen's plays produced by Brustein. After Robert Wilson mined the extreme possibilities of finding the poem in his radical auteur approach to Ibsen in *When We Dead Awaken* the previous season, Hall's work serves as a bridge between aesthetics, creating a production that is outwardly quite naturalistic but which plumbs the poetic soul of the play. A critic said it best when they wrote "Although Hall is no auteur, this is not a realistic production." (Clay *Hedda Gabler*) The pendulum would continue swinging towards traditional staging practices with François Rochaix's *The Wild Duck* four and a half years later. I noted to Brustein this movement in his theaters' Ibsen productions towards auteurism culminating with Wilson's work, followed by a movement away culminating in Rochaix's work and finally a melding of approaches with Kate Whoriskey (and his) work on *The Master Builder*. Though he found my theory interesting, from his perspective there were more practical considerations in matching director with play.

Brustein explained to me that the decision to stage *Hedda Gabler* came about because Candy Buckley, a company member at ART, had a long history of working with Hall at the Dallas Theatre Center. Brustein decided that with Hall's availability, it was an opportune time to give Buckley the chance to play Hedda, a role he felt suited her. (Brustein) Hedda Gabler was a General's daughter and an only child, Candy Buckley is an Air Force Colonel's daughter. Hall had worked with Buckley for years and could work with her to access her personal connection to the character, thus bringing to life the presence of the dead General who "determines the actions and characters of the play". As the show was about to open Buckley said in an interview, "My own father was a military war hero, captured at Bataan, a participant in the death march, and I was raised with no sons in the family. I know about what it's like for an officer's daughter. She doesn't chew gum or slouch. I know what cards Hedda's been dealt." (Marx) He was a director equipped to find, even in the most seemingly straightforward of naturalistic settings, the poetic soul of the play.

Brustein invited Adrian Hall to be resident guest director at ART in 1991 when he directed *King Lear* and 1992 when he directed *Hedda Gabler*. Hall and Brustein had a shared history as fathers of the regional theater movement in the United States. He was the founding

Artistic Director of the acclaimed Trinity Repertory Company in Rhode Island and headed it for twenty five years. In 1983 he also became the Artistic Director of the Dallas Theatre Center splitting his time between Rhode Island and Texas. Hall had previously directed for Brustein a Sam Shepard play at YRT in 1979. He also had much experience directing Ibsen. He had directed two productions of *Peer Gynt*, *Rosmersholm*, “a version of *An Enemy of the People* that included snippets from *Little Eyolf* and *The Master Builder*” (Marx), and *The Wild Duck*. A review of the latter most production describes Hall’s approach in Brustein-ian terms, “this poetically conceived production...has the temerity to treat Ibsen as a poet, instead of merely a social activist.” (Swan) In the program to *Hedda Gabler*, Hall included a long excerpt from Brustein’s “The Fate of Ibsenism” where he exhorts directors to “Find the poem inside the play, and you will have found the play” and links Shakespeare’s *King Lear* to Ibsen’s play. (*Hedda Program*) Hall had directed *Lear* at ART the previous year.

In Brustein’s opinion, in contrast to ART affiliated auteur directors such as Andrei Serban, Anne Bogart, and Robert Wilson who are acclaimed for their distinct theatrical aesthetic, Hall’s “greatness is with the actors and with creating the action of the play” (ISA 8) Hall is not a run-of-the-mill traditional director either, but in contrast to those auteurs, his aesthetic choices emanated from his interest in exploring the character of Hedda. Hall is known for his acclaimed adaptations of non-dramatic texts, and for his use of alternative spaces. He had famously staged a production of Durrenmatt’s *The Visit* in an actual railroad station and had created many theatrically daring productions with his longtime scenic designer Eugene Lee. As I will discuss later, he considered an alternative space for his *Hedda Gabler* as well.

Hall had directed much of the cast of *Hedda Gabler* in *King Lear* the prior year and set Shakespeare’s play in pre-Christian Europe. However, for *Hedda Gabler* he decided to maintain its original Victorian setting. Though this is a seemingly straightforward approach, Daniel Stern, the guest Literary Director at ART who adapted *Hedda Gabler* for the production reveals in his program note that:

“the earlier discussions between the director, the costume designer Catherine Zuber, and the set designer Derek McLane focused on one interior, the most significant one of all: the inner world of Hedda...Clearly, Hedda’s situation called for a décor expressive of the time and place against whose constraints she plays out her tragic farce of unrealizable hopes and dreams” (Stern, *Program Note*)

Stern explains that early in the rehearsal process the focus on Hedda's inner world was encapsulated in a quote that became the guiding metaphor for Hall and his collaborators as they set to work on the production. Though "at first it was thought to be from *Madame Bovary*" (ibid) the quote:

"I have sometimes thought that a woman's nature is like a great house full of rooms: there is the hall, through which everyone passes in going in and out; the drawing-room, where one receives formal visits; the sitting-room, where the members of the family come and go as they list; but beyond that, far beyond, are other rooms, the handles of whose doors perhaps are never turned; no one knows the way to them, no one knows whither they lead; and in the innermost room, the holy of holies, the soul sits alone and waits for a footstep that never comes." - Edith Wharton, "The Fullness of Life" Part II, December 1893 (ibid)

was actually from a short story by Edith Wharton. Hall was drawn to Wharton's quote because he was quite connected to her writing. He had adapted and directed *Ethan Frome* for the stage at Trinity Rep and had written, produced and directed an acclaimed miniseries of *The House of Mirth* in 1979 as well as her biography in 1980 for the Public Broadcasting Service. In an interview he compared Wharton's work to Ibsen's. "I also consider the case history of this woman [Hedda] caught in a social vise that is closing in on her a tragedy. I consider it a tragedy in the same way that I consider Edith Wharton's *House of Mirth* a tragedy." (Hall, CCC 8) Both Wharton's heroine Lilly Bart and Hedda Gabler commit suicide after feeling trapped in a world ruled by men in which they have no recourse to save themselves. He did not however set *Hedda Gabler* in turn of the century New York. Rather, as Daniel Stern describes above, Wharton's quote became a metaphor for an internal exploration of Hedda's character and its external manifestation in the design. Brustein found the poem in *The Wild Duck* and *Ghosts* through the metaphors of photography, and haunted houses respectively. Hall explained that:

the house was a metaphor—Widow Falk's villa—for Hedda. So I really would like to have rented a big Victorian house here in Cambridge [where ART is located] and have 60 or 70 people come in at each performance and sit along the walls in various rooms and have this story played out in front of them...Well, Bob Brustein didn't find that too practical. He just kind of looked and smiled and went away. (9)

With the site-specific concept rejected, Hall and his designers Derek McLane, Catherine Zuber, Natasha Katz, and Maribeth Back used the Wharton quote as an inspiration to set the play in

a spacious house consisting of a series of rooms, opening one into the other, through which the six haunted key characters pursue and flee each other...the house of many rooms affords a corner in which he [Løvborg] and Hedda can safely exchange titillating memories—while her husband and the ‘triangular’ family friend, Judge Brack, drink and smoke in another room: we see them all and, by the wizardry of stage design, they see each other. Hedda moves from room to room as one or another impulsive action leads to an unexpected result—gradually cornering her and forcing her into the last hidden fragment of space—from which there is, at last no escape. (Stern, *Program note*)

The resulting scenic design created a production of *Hedda Gabler* which was at first glance completely recognizable to audiences, in contrast to some of the productions Brustein had previously produced. Though externally recognizable, Hall’s production, like Ibsen’s play itself contained a poetic soul which many of the critics noted:

The set possessed the depth associated with a character, with its careful delineation of spaces that confine and trouble Hedda. Catherine Zuber seems to associate Hedda’s blue dress with the rectangle of sky above the stage that lights up as Ibsen’s curious heroine considers her plight, Natasha Katz’s blend of light and shadow is particularly notable for the celebrated finale (Becker)

Derek McLane’s Victorian set, one room behind another, includes a postmodernist rectangular sky cut into the facade of a building facing us. (Kelly, *Hedda*)

Natasha Katz’s lighting is wonderfully moody capturing the claustrophobia of fin-de-siecle Scandinavian society. Derek McLane’s audience-level, open-work set - a minimally furnished sitting room, backed by a glass door leading to the interior – means to suggest a big house of many empty rooms...Catherine Zuber’s non-elaborate Victorian costumes are well done. (Leonard)

In his exploration of Hedda’s soul, Hall aimed for a production with a strong but sympathetic Hedda. He had created a detailed back story for the character and wanted the audience to be emotionally invested “to the point that they begin to frantically search for a way out for Hedda. If that happens to our audience, it will be the kind of cathartic and emotional experience that I think Mr. Ibsen intended this to be.” (Hall, CCC 9)

How successful was Hall in achieving the poem he had found in *Hedda Gabler*?

Though I have seen the video of the production, I will rely on the critics' description of the play because they experienced it live. Because I took notes while watching the video on elements not described in many reviews, there will be times when I will have to rely on my impressions of the video heavily, rather than the reviews. The video was of the March 22nd performance. The stage managers Performance Report noted that, "Candy tried several new things tonight. A couple of them risky; all paid off. A very high level of concentration in the house tonight. The audience forced a renewed focus on the company." (Rehearsal Report, SM's production book)

The following sections will focus only on specific note worthy moments in the staging. Hall's choice to stage the actors facing out to the audience echoed Meyerhold's own staging. In his production, "Hedda and Løvborg played their first crucial scene together looking straight ahead, never once shifting their gaze or position, delivering the lines straight to the audience..." (Marker 176) His staging of several of the intimate scene with the actors on opposite side of the stage brings to mind Meyerhold's "non-realistic, lateral patterns of movement – in particular, widely spaced groupings – that undercut the very idea of 'life-likeness'." (ibid)

Critic Kevin Kelly provides a sense of Hall's directorial choices and staging. Brustein had compared *Hedda Gabler* to *Ghosts* in his brief discussion of it, and for Brustein, *Ghosts* has strong Greek overtones. Kelly's description of the production's style corresponds with this view and underscores the link between Hall and Meyerhold.

"Adrian Hall's direction supplants the play's realism with something close to the stylized gloom of Greek tragedy. The opening exposition...has been designed as side-by-side information booths. Juliana Tesman and Bertha...look out at the audience from opposite sides of a glass-paned door leading to George and Hedda Tesman's drawing room. Each one tells us a little more than we really need to know, the overload being Ibsen's outline for plot and motivation. Later Hall echoes the ceremonial style. Hedda and her would-be lover, Judge Brack, talk to each other – at opposite sides of a table - while staring straight at the audience. Later still Hedda and her rival, Thea Elvsted, show their warring emotions by focusing on us. Hedda seems to find her treacherous way by looking above our heads, sometimes with a big white smile coating her contempt. While this approach is, at best, stagily self-conscious, it does underline the accelerating drama..." (Kelly, *Hedda Gabler*)

Kelly's suggestion that Aunt Juliana and Bertha provide too much exposition in the opening is an aspect of Ibsen's text which Daniel Stern tried to grapple with in his adaptation

from Gosse's translation. Focusing on Aunt Juliana's line, "You have a new mistress, Berta dear" (Fjelde, 696) Stern explains:

"Well, Bertha already knows this, so why say it? I thought we'd take it out and just say, 'God knows how hard it is for me to let you go, Bertha dear.' And Bertha responds, 'It's hard for me too.' And a few lines later Bertha says: 'I worry that I won't be able to please my new young mistress.' Well, now we know we have a new young mistress, but we know it through dramatic tension—a long relationship is ending; there's anxiety over a new relationship—rather than through exposition." (ART News May 1992)

Though Stern tried to find a stronger action and motivation to what he described as a 'feather duster scene' - an expository scene covered up by the actors performing a task, Hall forgoes the more naturalistic trappings of the scene. In reference to the stage directions, he has Bertha and Juliana perform the entire scene from behind the glass doors in darkness, with only the actresses lit.

The lights came up to reveal the drawing room discussed above. Tesman, played by Michael Rudko, supplemented the character's pedantry with a sense of good heartedness or nobility. For me, there was a Jimmy Steward quality to the performance. Hedda, played by Candy Buckley, a statuesque redhead, entered from downstage center wearing a blue dress. A critic suggested that she was costumed in blue to suggest that she is sexually unfulfilled, in contrast to Thea who is costumed in red. When Aunt Juliana finally leaves Hedda excitedly crossed to the piano and passionately played "the Chopin Grande Valse Brillante...on the stage left piano." (Becker) Buckley had studied music education when she was at the university. The Chopin music was used throughout the production to underscore Hedda's inner turmoil.

Stephanie Roth's Thea Elvsted, in her red dress was described by critics as, "lovely and credible...eyes shining with love and soulful dedication, a willing helpmate no matter the abuse. Roth superbly restrains any sign of outward passion, but there's no mistaking the intensity." (Kelly) Carolyn Clay described Roth's interpretation as being "quietly assertive...flappable but not foldable, [she] does indeed display more strength than Hedda." (Clay) Though it is true that by the end, Roth's Thea shows her strength and commitment, in her first scene with Buckley, the actresses embodied Ibsen's description of their past relationship, "Thea: Oh, I was terribly afraid of you then!...Whenever we met on the stairs, you'd pull my hair...and once you said you would

burn it off.” (Fjelde, 711) It is only when Hedda feels she has run out of options, and to paraphrase Wharton, the footstep she awaits never comes, that Thea’s assertiveness fully blooms.

The storytelling throughout was very clear. The speech and voice coach for the production, Bonnie Raphael gave the actors a note “Adrian is ADAMANT about telling the story so that the audience can hear without any work at all.” (Raphael, SM Production Book) I heard many lines anew watching the archival video, which in other productions I’ve seen did not resonate as strongly. They were specifically lines which defined and expressed the relationship between characters. This commitment to Ibsen’s words is one element which stands in contrast to Meyerhold’s production in which the emphasis was on the overall impression scenes made but not on the words, which were delivered in a near monotone, created on the audience. (Marker, 176)

When Hedda reveals to Judge Brack that she has been “bored to death,” Brack responds in a darkly comic ironic tone, “You sound like you mean it.” As mentioned previously, Hall staged the Hedda and Brack on either side of a round table but they spoke facing the audience rather than one another. “With a scheme of somewhat stylized performances, directed more to the audience than the other characters, we become Hedda’s confidant.” (Leonard) The Greek like staging was particularly effective in such moments, foreshadowing Hedda’s actions and making the relationship between her and Brack clear. The same clarity was apparent when the Epstein’s lecherous Brack, with a combination of humor and menace defined his relationship with Tesman and Hedda “The most comfortable invention is the triangle. It makes everyone comfortable.” It is a particularly uncomfortable relationship for Hedda.

In his review, Michael Bronski noted that “Alvin Epstein is a particularly randy Judge Brack and Steven Skybell [is] a particularly sexy Eilert Løvborg, and Hall is perfectly right...in emphasizing the sexual tensions of the piece.” (Bronski) This theme, and the clarity of storytelling was further underscored in Tesman’s interchange with Løvborg - “Tesman: So, you’re not competing with me? Løvborg: Not for your appointment.” Tesman is relieved that his professional prospects are safe while oblivious to Løvborg’s romantic intentions regarding Hedda. As played by Skybell, this “authentically Dionysian and searingly emotional” (Lehman) man is “torn by his desire for Hedda, his allegiance to Thea, and his self-destructive behavior.” (Forman)

As Løvborg recalled their past relationship, he turned to Hedda and asked, “Why didn’t you shoot me?” she faced the audience. She replied to Eilert and the audience “I was afraid of scandal.” This staging underscored the Hall’s concept of the audiences-as-confidant. His response, “Hedda, you are a coward” propelled Hedda to attempt to control a man’s destiny. The stove in which Hedda burned Løvborg’s manuscript was situated far downstage, very close to the audience. As Hedda actually burned the papers, for the audience to see up close, she faced them with a pained look in her eyes. As she cried out her lines “I’m burning your child...” a version of the Chopin music she had played earlier sounded wildly in the background.

As her world unraveled in the final act, Hedda was trapped but reacts as a good General’s daughter should. “Candy Buckley is distant and coldly contemptuous throughout. There’s no hint of despair or desperation behind her bleak exterior; no sense that she’s the victim of a male-dominated society. But what fascinates us – is the transparent play of deep emotions dancing across her soul.” (Leonard) As Tesman and Thea began reconstructing Løvborg’s manuscript upstage right, Brack taunted Hedda about the scandal she faced in another space on the open set, further downstage-stage-left closer to the audience. As Judge Brack thought he had firmly established his strangle hold upon Hedda, she finally escaped into her ‘holy of holies’ by her piano and drew the curtain. For the first time in Hall’s staging, Hedda was in a space onstage unseen by either the other characters or the audience. Refusing to be held captive anymore, the general’s daughter called out to Judge Brack from beyond the curtain, “Congratulations Judge Brack, the only cock in the barnyard” and shot herself. Hall had cut the line, “Oh no, she’s playing with those pistols again”. (SM Production Script) As the curtain was drawn back, Tesman and Thea faces filled with horror, as Brack in a half ironic tone turned to the audience and said, “Good god, people don’t do such things.”

“There’s a chill in Hall’s final moment...the stage darkens, the anguished faces of Tesman, Brack, and Thea are caught in the slowly closing beam of a spotlight.” (Kelly) Bergman’s production, in contrast to Hall’s, aimed to expose the anatomy of a suicide, with the suicide itself in full view of the audience. Hall in a seemingly Brustein inspired choice, emphasized the unknowable, uncertain, and sacred element of Hedda’s soul by framing her suicide as the only moment in the play in which Hedda is truly alone, hidden from view not only from the other characters but also from the audience.

Brustein assessed the production as being “among our more powerful productions of the year, it really is an Ibsen that most people would have found completely recognizable.” (ISA 8) That was the Hall’s aim with the production, to find the poem in the play that would deeply resonate with the audience. Through his distinctly American poetic lens of novelist Edith Wharton’s words, he managed to mine the recesses of *Hedda Gabler*’s unknowable soul while maintaining the integrity of Ibsen’s period surface.

Part 7
The Wild Duck – ART
a straightforward rendering? Part 2

François Rochaix's production of *The Wild Duck* at ART in 1996 represents a continued shift in the focus of Brustein's theater's exploration of Ibsen's poetic soul. Its examination of the poetic Ibsen via staging was less overt and more subtle than *The Wild Duck* productions that either Rochaix or Brustein had attempted in the past. What sets this production apart from the other YRT and ART Ibsen productions is that it was the only one helmed by a European director. There is an irony that the one Ibsen production at either YRT or ART to be directed by a European director is not an obvious reflection of the highly experimental European tradition laid out in Frederick J. and Lise-Lone Marker's *Ibsen's Lively Art*. Brustein had already staged his own production, in the auteur manner of Andre Serban at YRT, and had seen and much admired another Romanian director, Lucian Pintilie's highly conceptual production of *The Wild Duck* at Arena Stage in Washington DC in 1986. The 1996 production at ART was an opportunity to explore the structure and inner workings of Ibsen's play. Rochaix too had directed a stylized production of the play in Oslo in 1986. In Norway, "There were often scandals surrounding my productions...where I'm considered a leftist or feminist, or something." (Rochaix, ART News, May, 1996)

The actress, Anne E. Kokkinn, played the role of Hedvig when she was eleven years old in Rochaix's National Theater production which was staged at the Torshov Theatre. In a correspondence with me she provided her memories of the production and Rochaix's approach to the material.

"My main memories, I was only 11 at the time, is that when it comes to text, François was very true to the Ibsen version, and the original text, I don't think many lines were cut, and I'm quite sure the script was not a so called adaptation but the words as Ibsen wrote them. An important issue was that the director wanted Hedvig to be played by a young girl, and not an educated young looking actress. He wanted to focus on a real child, so that the main theme, the child not being seen by the grown ups, would make an even stronger impression. As you know, the Torshov Theatre is a round space, almost like small circus arena. We played with the audience in a 360 degree seating, as if one as an audience were the wallpaper, so to speak. Everything was in grey tones, when it came to costumes and set and both my hair and Gina's, was red, like the Irish, so I believe the duality of grey and the red was an important element visually." (Kokkinn)

Brustein's 1978 *The Wild Duck* sought to externalize the poem in Ibsen's play through the metaphor of photography and seeing. Rochaix, like Brustein, considers Ibsen 'more a poet than a social philosopher'. He and his long time scenic designer Jean-Claude Maret already directed and designed an unconventional staging in the round. On ART's proscenium stage Rochaix "emphasizes Ibsen's spatial metaphors and the nested stage 'realms' that represent the social and psychological forces at work on the lives of his invented creatures." (Scanlan, "Diving to the Bottom") They aimed to subtly excavate the poetic world Ibsen created through the language, structure, and setting of his play. The choice also reflects Brustein's success in bringing a new interpretation of Ibsen to the American stage. By 1996, there had already been several notable experimental productions of *The Wild Duck*, with which Brustein's audiences would have been familiar. Furthermore, several of Bergman's production had been presented in the United States for audiences to be exposed to his methods. His production thus, was an opportunity to go in the other direction and focus on the internal workings of Ibsen play and provide a fresh assessment of Ibsen language and dramatic method on the American stage. Rochaix's method of plumbing the depths of Ibsen's poetry with the actors and the designers in this production was accomplished by paying close attention to what Ibsen was saying or indicating through his words.

Rochaix, a Swiss opera and theater director, had previously directed *Tartuffe*, and *The Oresteia* at ART, as well as the American premiere of Michel Vinaver's *Overboard* at the Institute for Advanced Theater Training. In 1996, he became the director of the Institute. He was an appropriate choice for a production that was aiming to explore the inner working of the play and its language. He speaks Norwegian and had a particular interest in Ibsen. Brustein told me that it was Rochaix's choice to direct *The Wild Duck*. He had previously directed it at the National Theatre in Oslo in 1986. According to director Kate Whoriskey who was an Institute student at the time, Rochaix was the one member of the directing faculty who had the directing students work on Ibsen scenes. According to Whoriskey, "He was interested in classics and visual theater. He did naturalism. [But] his approach to each play changed according to the material." (Kate Whoriskey)

Where Brustein had used a slightly adapted version of Meyer's published translation, Rochaix commissioned Brustein to write a new adaptation for his production. In the introduction

to the published version, Brustein explains that his, “task was to try to chart a course between the stodgy Victorian locutions of the William Archer school and an excessively colloquial modern treatment while also trying to reclaim Ibsen for our time...It is...an attempt to dig a fresh tunnel into the obscure poem buried in its heart.” (*Duck* 3) The most controversial instance of this was the last line in the play. Relling’s last line is usually translated as “Go to hell”, “the devil with you” or in Meyer’s version simply having him spit at Gregers. Brustein adapted Relling’s final words as “Fuck You!” The line made audiences uncomfortable and was changed in performance to “Go to Hell”. However Brustein claimed that if Ibsen had not had censors or were alive today he might have employed Brustein’s phrase of choice. (*Duck* 5)

Rochaix was happy with the adaptation, “because it has a fluidity and an elegance and is faithful to the Norwegian text.” (Rochaix, “Fowl Play”) The same article also provides insight to the director’s collaboration with Brustein, “Sometimes I wanted something from an actor that I just was not getting, and we saw that in the English we had words with a lot of vowels but in the Norwegian it was all consonants. Then we changed it and it worked. Ibsen knew what he was doing.” (ibid)

“François is bringing out the humor in the play” Marianne Owen, who played Mrs. Sørby, revealed to a reporter. (Marianne Owen) Critics agreed with the assessment that Rochaix, working with Brustein’s adaptation had managed to bring out the play’s comedic elements within the tragedy that unfolds. According to Brustein the production “pleased everybody, audiences, critics, and scholars alike.” (*The Lively ART* 11)

Rochaix declared that mining the humor within the tragedy was one of his aims in his director’s note:

“As in ancient Greek tragedy, the whole sweep of the action is announced at the outset, and everything comes to pass, alas, as foretold. Ibsen throws in a terrible surprise at the end. It is foreshadowed, before Chekhov’s *Seagull*, before Pirandello’s *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, by an offstage gunshot. But the tragedy of *The Wild Duck* is latent in the first act. It begins, indeed, like a comedy; as does *A Doll’s House*. It is only once the journey has begun that the screw turns, and suddenly we find ourselves in the midst of a tragedy.” (Rochaix, “The Play of Analogies”)

As Brustein had told his own cast when he directed the play in 1978, “It is one of the first tragic-comedies.” (Bertin, 2) Rochaix, like Brustein noted the connection between Ibsen and the

Greek dramatic tradition. Rochaix and Maret underscored both the comedy and tragedy in their choice of scenic design for the first act. David Napoleon explains that Instead of a traditional looking study with book lined walls, they set the scene in a bright red foyer, whose red doors lead into the Werle's dinner party.

“Guests wander in and out of doors at either end of a narrow, elegant foyer. They stroll past sharply angled flame-red walls. On a gold bench, upholstered in red velvet, two friends talk about old times, while others laugh, gossip, or engage in a game of blind man's bluff. In the ART production of *The Wild Duck*, spectators cannot see past the foyer into the interior of Håkon Werle's world. But neither can some of the characters in Ibsen's play.” (Napoleon, 10)

The choice of bright red, a vibrant color, supported the setting of a party and the tone of a comedic prologue, while simultaneously suggesting the bloody tragedy which is ‘latent in the first act’ and which becomes manifest by the play's end.

Rochaix accentuate the ideas of blindness and uncertainty in a drastically subtler method than Brustein had in 1978. He simply did not allow the audience to see what was happening inside Werle's dinner party. They could see the bright red doors open and close and hear the sounds coming from inside, but they could not see any of the action inside.

Costume designer Catherine Zuber created “theatrical garments for the first scene” (ibid) which again underscored the theatrical party atmosphere. In contrast to everyone else at the party who was dressed in his or her best evening wear, she costumed Gregers Werle, played by Stephen Rowe, in mud encrusted dirty boots and pants as if he was just arriving from the Høydal. Completely disconnected from home, family, and friends for years, the news he received at the party sent a shock to his already troubled soul.

The most striking moment in the first act was the end. It was different from any of the productions the Markers discuss in *Ibsen's Lively Art*. As in Brustein's production, the party guests enacted a game of blind man's bluff around Mrs. Sørby. In Rochaix's production loud party music, designed by Christopher Walker, played as the entire set, which was built on an elevator, descended underneath the stage and the threadbare Ekdal loft was revealed. The staged transition emphasized the shifting landscape of the play's inner and outer character. A world of affluence and power gave way to one of poverty and illusion. An ominous yet rowdy game of blindness accompanied the sinking set with everyone onboard. This eerie close to the first act effectively established the tone for what was to come in the later acts.

The Ekdal residence was a naturalistic, large, sparsely furnished loft with high ceiling and skylight, furnace, table, chairs, and a rocking horse. It was described by Maret as, “an empty space like an island on the sea...the attic on the island is far away, isolated, protected from everything but very vulnerable.” (ibid) David Napoleon goes on to analyze how through naturalistic design Maret accentuated the fragility of their home by using beige paper like tones for the space. In contrast to the first act costumes, Zuber dressed the actors in simple period garments which looked lived in. Lighting designer Michael Chybowski made effective use of the skylight establishing the mood, time of day, passage of time, and weather throughout. (ibid)

Maret and Rochaix’s greatest departure from traditional staging was placing the wild duck’s preserve downstage in the orchestra pit, again, out of sight from the audience, rather than in the eaves of the loft. They wanted the audience to see the scenes down there “only through the eyes of the characters, who periodically climbed down a ladder to enter the unexposed environment. Maret says he took his cue from speeches Hedvig makes about life at the bottom of the sea, where the duck was trapped before its rescue.” (ibid) Although the space remained unseen by audience, Rochaix did place live animals below, which could be heard by the audience when the door in the floor was lifted. From the stage managers production book I discovered that there was a net placed in the space so that the birds could not escape mid performance. There were also practical reasons for placing the duck’s preserve at the front of the stage. It ensured that the actor faces could be seen by the audience when they looked down into the space. Furthermore, “The characters speak to the public over this hole where they hide their fantasies...the characters must protect their imaginings from the real world, as represented by the public.” (ibid) Their interpretation, with its emphasis on the audience experiencing the loft through the characters eyes, echoes Bergman’s dematerialized loft space at the front of the stage. However, by focusing on Ibsen’s text in this production, they reconceptualized the loft as a physical stage realm which embodied Hedvig’s description of a subterranean space.

I had watched the video of this production and read the review. In contrast to the previous productions discussed, with the exception of placing the wild duck’s preserve in the orchestra pit, the physical staging and acting in the final four acts was fairly traditional. The storytelling and relationships between the characters was very clear. Moments of levity and opportunities for

comedy in the staging were accentuated: e.g. during old Ekdal's entrance in Act two, along with his overcoat, he removed his hair, a toupee, revealing a bald pate.

The most notable moment for me related again to the issue of causality and uncertainty in the play. Rochaix did not attempt anything stylistically to question the idea of causality or to heighten issues of uncertainty. Nonetheless, the Act Two conversation about Hedvig's sight when Gina and Hjalmar revealed to Gregers that Hedvig would go blind from an illness inherited from Hjalmar's mother was staged and performed with such simplicity and force that the important piece of information lingered with the viewer until later in the play. The staging and Brustein slightly simplified language established a legitimate case for Hjalmar's paternity. By doing so early on, it heighten the sense of uncertainty regarding Hedvig's ancestry when information about Gina and Håkon Werle was revealed later in the play. Ultimately through the senseless tragedy of Hedvig's suicide, Ibsen was critiquing the idea of causality and certainty. Had Hjalmar accepted Gina's uncertainty regarding Hedvig's lineage instead of Gregers' certainty, tragedy would have been averted. It is Hjalmar's choice to accept a questionable scientific 'fact' over the true love of his daughter that leads to disaster. In Rochaix's production this theme came across particularly clearly to me.

The extent of Brustein's influence on how Ibsen, the play, and Rochaix's production were interpreted by critics, even though he did not direct it, can be appreciated from the closing section of *The Boston Globe's* positive review of François Rochaix's production.

Robbing Ekdal of his illusions in the name of idealism and ideology is exactly what Gregers has in mind. Rowe brings a frightening maliciousness to a role that symbolizes much of what Brustein articulately despises about today's forms of political correctness. Either before or after you see the play you should read Brustein's chapter on Ibsen in *The Theatre of Revolt*. ...As Brustein says, *The Wild Duck* was Ibsen's attempt to balance, not repudiate *An Enemy of the People*. And in the ART's *Wild Duck*, everything is in balance." (Siegel)

Siegel's review of the ART production once again highlights Brustein's contribution to how Ibsen is understood in the United States in both theory and performance. It further emphasizes the gap in the Markers' and other's analysis of contemporary Ibsen production. By ignoring

Brustein's contribution they ignored an important player in how Ibsen is staged and interpreted today.

Furthermore, the reviewer's discussion of political correctness in the context of an Ibsen play calls attention not only to Ibsen's relevance today, but to the influence Ibsen had on Brustein. 1996, when *The Wild Duck* was staged at ART, was the time that Brustein was engaged in a fierce debate related to race and culture with playwright August Wilson which has been mentioned in the introduction to this thesis.

Just as *The Wild Duck*, as noted by Siegel, can be interpreted as a counterbalance to *An Enemy of the People*, ART's productions of *Hedda Gabler* and *The Wild Duck* can be understood as a balance to the previous production YRT and ART staged which had emphasized radically externalizing the poem in Ibsen's play. ART's 1999 production of *The Master Builder*, which will be discussed in the next section, can perhaps then be taken as a synthesis between the different impulses and approaches to finding the poem in Ibsen's plays in Brustein's theater.

Part 8
The Master Builder – ART
Youth Knocking on the Master's Door

In many ways the 1999 production of *The Master Builder* at ART was a culmination of Brustein's engagement with Ibsen. *The Master Builder* holds a special place in Brustein's conception of Ibsen. He devotes considerable space to it in *The Theatre of Revolt*. It served as the fulcrum of his argument that Ibsen was a non-realistic, non-causal playwright in his appropriately titled essay *A Crack in the Chimney*. The production was the final Ibsen production by ART to date and serves as a culmination of Brustein's aim as an educator to train a new generation of American theater artists who meld daring theatrical aesthetics with a serious engagement with text. *The Master Builder* was the first time Brustein ever invited a student to direct on ART's mainstage. Brustein intended to direct it with the recent Institute graduate Kate Whoriskey and serve as her mentor but he completely handed over the reigns to her on the second day of rehearsal. Whoriskey's modernist visual aesthetic has often compared to Robert Wilson's. Brustein wrote the adaptation for the production, worked hand-in-hand with Whoriskey during pre-production, and taught her Ibsen at the Institute. This section will analyze in what ways the production was a culmination of Brustein's Ibsen theater laboratory.

Although the play *The Master Builder* is not included as a chapter in their book *Ibsen's Lively Art*, the Frederick J. and Lise-Lone Marker do briefly discuss a few productions of the play as it relates to works they do analyze. Of particular interest is their discussion of Aurelien Lugné-Poë's production of the play at his Théâtre de l'Œuvre in Paris in 1894. Lugné-Poë's theater explored symbolism in the theater and applied that style to his Ibsen productions as well. His productions were exemplified by:

what he called *décor de suggestion* to evoke an appropriate mood by means of color, line, and light. These shadowy starkly simplified settings, comprised largely of primitive painted backdrops and a bare minimum of furniture and properties, were dreamscapes cloaked in semi-darkness, devoid of clear-cut lines and precise details... Lugné-Poë's acting company...adopted a system of slow, trance-like gestures and a portentously intoned, even chanted delivery in order to intensify the desired atmosphere of strangeness, enigma, and dream. (Marker, 18-9)

This near Wilsonian approach was praised by Ibsen himself when he saw Lugné-Poë's production of *The Master Builder* in Christiania. He pronounced it "the resurrection of my play." (Marker, 19) Robert Brustein's mission for forty years was to resurrect Ibsen's plays in the American consciousness from the dead social-realist interpretation embodied in Miller's Ibsenite tradition. Brustein argues that it is a misrepresentation of Ibsen's legacy and detrimental to the development of American theater.

Brustein chose Whoriskey to direct the production because:

As a directing student at the A.R.T. Institute for Advanced Theatre Training, Kate demonstrated that she was one of the most extraordinary directors we had ever had the pleasure of working with. She has a very special visionary and symbolic imagination that isn't rooted in any mundane reality... and she creates exquisite stage images. ("Words and Pictures", ART News 1999)

At the Institute, Whoriskey was not interested in directed classic texts. She directed productions of Pinter's *A Night Out*, *Best Intentions*, the adaptation of the novel that Bergman wrote, William's *27 Wagons Full of Cotton*, and a Cervantes piece. (Whoriskey) For Brustein, this was another opportunity to engage an avant-garde director with Ibsen's text.

When asked why he chose to co-direct the production with her, he jokingly responded that "I thought it was appropriate, given the play, which is about an older man who forms a fateful association with a younger woman, leading to his death!" (ibid) This link between the play's theme and the fact that Brustein was giving an opportunity to a very young director was discussed in many of the reviews and articles surrounding the production. But Brustein subsequently provided a serious explanation:

My main responsibility is to do what Solness does; to ask for a firm foundation under the marvelous castles in the air that Kate builds. I bring a more prosaic, practiced eye to her imaginative creations. We complement each other well. As soon as Kate has established the necessary relationship with our acting company, I'll back out. (ibid)

Whoriskey told me that though she had read some of Ibsen's plays before being approached by Brustein and had attended his course Repertory Ideals, in which he laid out his theoretical views on Ibsen, she had never read *The Master Builder*. In our interview, Whoriskey provided much insight into her pre-production process.

The production was staged in the fall after Whoriskey graduated, so during her final semester, in addition to all her other obligations at the Institute, she prepared herself to direct *The Master Builder* on the mainstage. Robert Scanlan, her script analysis teacher had instructed the directing students to always:

Read the play seven times, before you make any comments on it.' I remember just reading the play without taking notes seven times, only because I was told to do that, really. I read a lot of articles about him and I read his biography and then I also of course read all of Bob [Brustein]'s comments - Everything that he had written at the time, I read. And then I went about doing the plot bead diagram, which you have an example of. And I storyboarded the show, and I looked at a lot of different translations. And then I did a lot of visual research on Norway, what that looked like, but also images that for whatever reason captured the spirit of it – the chair... I remember thinking I wanted that chair to be his chair. I did a lot of research on design, and architecture, architect offices, things like that. (ibid)

The fact that Whoriskey read everything Brustein had written about Ibsen is very important because it establishes beyond a shadow of a doubt that her production was influenced by Brustein's views on Ibsen. Unlike Thomas Haas, who had directed *When We Dead Awaken* in 1971, Whoriskey is an auteur director, who has her own distinct style, approach, and vision through which to filter Brustein's theory and Ibsen's play. Although her work is often compared with Robert Wilson's, there is a major difference in their approach. "I'm interested in psychology. Robert Wilson has no interest in psychology, text or analysis. Having worked with him, I remember... he's very visual, he's not interested in psychology." (ibid) Psychology would play a central role in Whoriskey's production. Brustein provided Whoriskey a firm theoretical grounding in the ideas of Ibsen. As Whoriskey recalled, "he's a great researcher, he provided a lot of information and a great lens to look at the material with." (ibid)

Whoriskey worked to integrate the "firm foundation" and lenses Brustein provided into her production. They included: Solness's psychology as an older man, as a narcissist, an exploration of what the trolls were in the play, and "The causality question, the crack in the chimney question. It was the exact essay, verbatim – that sense that the world lacked causality." (ibid)

Brustein had written much about the lack of causality in the play, and had discussed the idea of unseen "trolls" being present in Ibsen's work. He had also written about Solness as an older man feeling threatened by the youth around him and "his need to do something creative."

(Whoriskey, “Notes”) But Solness’s psychology as a narcissist was not an issue Brustein had discussed when he wrote his theory on *The Master Builder*. He had discussed his Viking amorality and his rebellion against god, an idea from which an exploration of his narcissism might have developed. However, it was not until he worked with Whoriskey in production that these ideas regarding Narcissism came to the fore. Perhaps she even influenced his understanding of the play with her interest in psychology.

His one reference to narcissism in “The Fate of Ibsenism” is not related to Solness but is in reference to a letter Ibsen wrote to Brandes. Brustein specifically cautions against interpreting Ibsen’s use of “egoism”, in reference to artistic genius, as narcissism. (*Critical Moments*, 133) In Whoriskey’s preparatory notes for the production Brustein’s concept of Solness as a rebel against God is clear. She however, interprets his revolt against god and feeling of omnipotence as a reflection of his narcissism. Whereas Brustein interpreted the character as a heroic rebel, Whoriskey does not. He is a “supreme narcissist with his dreams of omnipotence, his manipulations and his cruelty.” (Whoriskey, “Notes”)

Brustein had referred to Solness’s powers over the people in his life, and had discussed the trolls briefly in “The Crack in the Chimney”. His views on *The Master Builder* from *The Theatre of Revolt* were republished in ART News under the title “Climbing High” in conjunction with the production. Brustein described *The Master Builder* as “the best play of this final period...the religious, mystical, and poetic strains in Ibsen’s nature, repressed though a gigantic exertion of will, have burst forth again, now contained within a domestic but strongly symbolic framework and communicated through a prose heavily charged with ambiguity.” (*Revolt*, 75)

Brustein continued by again providing a biographical interpretation of the play with Solness serving as a self portrait of Ibsen as a man and a writer. Solness’s development as a builder “parallels Ibsen’s development from his epic poetic plays to his realistic prose works to the symbolic, poetic realism of his last period.” (ibid) Brustein went on to discuss the Messianic and religious elements of the play, interpreting Solness as “warring with God, he is finally conquered through overweening pride; but his defeat is a partial victory—he has also conquered God by attempting the deeds he feared most to do.” (ibid, 78)

Whoriskey however, in contrast to director Thomas Haas at YRT, was not slavish in her application of Brustein's views on Ibsen. She and Brustein had their share of disagreements regarding interpretation as well:

He wanted very contemporary language that felt to me like it would Americanize it, and I didn't want to Americanize the production. He wanted Solness to really be a hero, and I didn't perceive him as a hero. I was also more interested in Solness as, not as a sexual predator, but as someone who had done something to Hilde. There's something that happened that he's more haunted. (Whoriskey)

But Solness's narcissism and the idea of a non-causal world became central concepts for Whoriskey's production. Brustein chose her because he admired her visual aesthetic which is often compared to Robert Wilson's. However, in stark contrast to Wilson, she is deeply interested in the psychology of the characters. She explained to me how her work is different from Wilson's and provided insight into both her work method and her use of Wilson-like formalism in this production:

I don't think that I'm like Wilson at all... I'm interested in psychology. Robert Wilson has no interest in psychology, text or analysis. Having worked with him [on *Woyzeck*], I remember...What I find interesting about Robert Wilson...is that there is a kind of perfection, a physical perfection, which has nothing to do with the psychology of the actor. And in a way I wanted to do the opposite, which is to create a set design that has precision but that ultimately the actor acted opposite it – this formality, like the set had the formality and the actor's life is...not in counter to it, but it's not that the set has perfection and the actor has perfection. The actor has this emotional life that will go wherever it's going and the set is this formal structure behind it.

I wanted the actors to understand the psychology of the set design, but not to have the formality of the set design indicate their kind of movement. (Whoriskey)

But there were formalist elements to much of the actors' movements in the opening scene and to Aline's movements in general. Scholar Elinor Fuchs described the style of the opening scene to be in homage to Robert Wilson:

Uh-oh,' I murmur to my companion. 'It looks like this is going to be *Solness on the Beach*.'... There, ranged behind glass booths, counting into microphones, are Master Builder Solness's staff, the vulnerable bookkeeper Kaja, the feckless young architect Ragnar, and Ragnar's ailing draftsman father Lucinda Childs-rigid in right-angle profile, Kaja rhythmically turns her ledger pages with a snap and counts, over and over, 'One-two-three-four-fivesix-seven-eight.' (Fuchs, *American Theatre*, 42)

When I brought this up to Whoriskey she differentiated her use of highly choreographed formalistic movement of the actors from Wilson's approach:

There definitely was formality to their movement but the impulse was not that if they hit the formality than they would have succeeded. Except the movement in the first act. It had to feel like the sense of being entrapped. If they did the movement correctly they wouldn't have won. They had to embody a kind of behavior for the movement to work. All of the other characters were choreographed, and Hilde and Solness weren't. That they could actually move freely and interact freely but the other couldn't. [The rest of the cast were what the narcissist Solness perceived them to be or embodied what he needed from them.] There's a tension between their physical behavior and their internal life...but the physical behavior was given to them and they had to hit that physical behavior. (Whoriskey)

In contrast to Wilson, she worked with her actors to fill the rigid container which she had created for the play. Furthermore, though moments of the production seemed Wilsonian due to the rigid movements of the actors and the design, the rigidity was less a demand of Whoriskey's visual aesthetic than of her interpretation of *The Master Builder* as a narcissist fantasy.

Though she is often linked aesthetically to Robert Wilson her artistic influences are actually: the directing faculty at the Institute, choreographer Pina Bausch and directors like Jerzy Grotowski, Elizabeth LeCompte, Robert Woodruff whom she assisted at ART, as well as Kevin Kuhlke, her mentor at the Experimental Theater Wing at New York University where she received her undergraduate training. ("Words and Pictures", ART News)

While there are echoes of Aurelien Lugné-Poë's method in both Whoriskey and Brustein's approach to Ibsen, Whoriskey's artistic influences are artists with whom she either personally worked, or whose work she had seen and admired. Brustein's mission at both Yale/YRT and Harvard/ART was to revitalize American theater by introducing its practitioner and audience to a European aesthetic. Brustein was an American pioneer in mining the poem in Ibsen's plays, just as Lugné-Poë was an early pioneer of exploring Ibsen's symbolism in the prior century.

Both Lugné-Poë and Whoriskey productions featured stark scenic design with "a bare minimum of furniture." (Marker, 19) Whoriskey normally hates having furniture on stage and though there was some furniture on stage, it was only what was absolutely necessary for Solness – specifically his chair:

I really, truly, tried to get the exact right furniture for him – I think if he’s an architect that it really has to be right. I actually did a whole study of furniture, for the first time caring about furniture. It’s like doing a play about Frank Lloyd Wright and not caring about the chairs – it’s a problem. You’ve got to start caring about what they care about. (Whoriskey)

Again, Whoriskey underscored the importance of understanding character in her approach to the play. Though both she and Lugné-Poë employed “starkly simplified” (Marker, 18) non-naturalistic settings, Whoriskey’s were sleekly designed, but in contrast to Lugné-Poë’s setting, technically quite complicated. They served a central function in establishing the narcissistic fantasy playworld, where as Lugné-Poë’s designs were so non-specific that there may not have been any design sketches made for them. (Marker, *ibid*)

The concept of Solness as a narcissist became a central visual metaphor for the production. Narcissists “compartmentalize people, you actually don’t fully recognize any individual, but you only recognize individuals for what they’re doing for you.” (Whoriskey) To establish the concept in her production she and her scenic designer Christine Jones, after trying various concepts, decided upon a design in which Knut Brovik, Ragnar Brokvik and Kaja Fosli were each enclosed in separate compartments in the wall of the set and Aline was suspended in a glass elevator. Solness was the only character at the start of the play that was not confined.

What we were trying to do, literally each person was put in a box of sorts, some sort of box. And that when Hilde enters, she actually comes through a crack, and she actually has full use of the space, so she can go anywhere, she can actually go into other people’s spaces, she has autonomy...and no one else does. And at the end of the first act I remember a wall lifting, and his wife was kind of stuck in that box, her box stayed, and floated, while they had their Hilde and Solness exchange. (Whoriskey)

The rigidity of the set design was offset by Catherine Zuber’s period costumes which were devoid of details and decorations. Zuber explained her choice to contrast the highly stylized set with period costumes. “I felt that here the costumes needed to provide a human connection. It would have been alienating to have the costumes as stark and stylized as the set. They allow us to feel compassion for these people...the things that are closest to the characters, clothes and the things they touch, should be more real.” (Anderman)

By having Hilde enter the play through a crack in the wall, rather than a door Whoriskey created physical metaphor for Brustein's theory that the play lacks causality. Whoriskey furthered this concept in both through design and staging. "In a lot of Hilde's behavior, we tried to have her suddenly appear in places where she shouldn't have been able to appear. And also staging it more from a psychological point of view, in terms of how things come at you psychologically as opposed to narratively." (Whoriskey)

Whoriskey and Jones consulted with the Boston Psychoanalytical Society and Institute, a group of psychoanalysts who discuss literature and art, who confirmed that their design was an accurate visualization of a narcissist's inner world. "They get together, 10 psychiatrists who like to talk about plays, and so they'll all read the play and they'll all fight vehemently about what each other thinks. It's terrific." (ibid)

Psychology was not the only reference point for Whoriskey when conceiving her production. She was also inspired by a poem which Ibsen had composed prior to writing *The Master Builder*:

They dwell, those two, in so cozy a house
In autumn and winter weather.
Then came the fire—and the house was gone.
They must search the ashes together.
For down in the ashes a jewel lies hid
Whose brightness the flames could not smother,
And search them but faithfully, he and she,
'Twill be found by one or the other.
But e'en though they find it, the gem they lost,
The enduring jewel they cherished—
She ne'er will recover her vanished faith,
Nor he the joy that has perished. (*The Master Builder* Program)

Errol Durbach writes about Muriel Bradbrook's *Ibsen the Norwegian* in which she argues that *The Master Builder* "is a dramatic extension of the desiccated and calamitous conditions of the fire-ravaged couple of 'De sad der, de to-', a poem written seven years before." (Durbach, 242-3) Whoriskey essentially explored this theoretical idea on stage - showing the link between Ibsen's poetry and drama and literally finding the poem in the play. The poem was included in

the production program so that audiences could also gain insight into the creation of both Ibsen's and Whoriskey's work.

In her production ashes and the sense of pervading loss and death played a central role in the design she chose for the piece. There were ashes on the floor throughout, and it rained ash during the final act. "The flowers that Mrs. Solness waters are dead - gray, scraggly, dead plants with no leaves - and what comes out of her watering can are ashes." (Ryan McKittrick, *Master Builder* Program) And as with Brustein's *Ghosts* in which the dead haunted the living, at the end of the second act a pair of burnt rocking horses on stage started rocking on their own indicating the haunted presence of the Solness children.

This was a moment which Whoriskey had initially suggested to Brustein and he loved the idea. Eventually Whoriskey had a change of heart. "I hate that idea, I hated the idea...I thought, it was really obvious to me...I thought of the idea, so I liked the idea at one point, but then I thought, "God, it's just too - it should be felt and not seen, in a way. There's a way of...an idea that shows what was happening." (Whoriskey)

Brustein though was smitten with that image and despite Whoriskey's displeasure; the rocking horses were kept in the production. Brustein was enamored with them because they resonated with his method of exploring the ghosts in *Ghosts*. Though they ultimately disagreed as to whether to materialize the presence of the ghosts of the dead children onstage, the initial impulse of exploring unseen forces present in the play was shared by both of them. That impulse was first expressed in Lugné-Poë's symbolist production of the play. (Marker, 18)

In general though, Whoriskey had trouble developing a theatrical reality for the concept of trolls in the play. The unseen forces were important to Brustein. He had written about and had discussed them with her. Though they had attempted to incorporate the idea of trolls in some way into the production, it never materialized:

The trolls, I remember honestly being unsuccessful with it. I think at the time we thought it should be between the actors, how they experience the trolls, and I think we had some underscoring, we made some sound that underscored the sections - the only thing, I never really cracked that idea, I could never find an American parallel for it, to be honest. I knew I should've but it was very hard for me. It always seemed like a shared fantasy life, it didn't seem like a cultural belief...for me, that's what it read as. So I always tried to give it more meaning and I never found a way to do it. (Whoriskey)

Though she was unable to successfully activating the idea of trolls on stage, Whoriskey was successful in making manifest the other concepts Brustein initially laid out for her.

Brustein chose Whoriskey because he admired her visual theatrical aesthetic. However, an analysis of her unpublished correspondences to Brustein about his adaptation, indicate that her interest in Ibsen went much deeper than creating an appropriate visual world. They also provide further insight into their collaboration and Brustein's process of creating the adaptation.

Brustein's sought to create an adaptation in which, "the sentences are relatively short, losing the dry, soporific quality of Archer and gaining a tempo and rhythm that is familiar to contemporary American ears." (Ryan McKittrick) But Brustein's challenge in adapting the play went deeper than providing a language with which both the actors and audience would feel comfortable. The goal would be to create an adaptation in which each character's voice was differentiated based on their background and personality in a streamlined text which embodied Whoriskey and Brustein's vision for the production. (Whoriskey, "First round of notes on Bob's translation", 1) Fuchs praised Brustein's work adapting Ibsen's text, "In his skillful adaptation, American Rep artistic director Robert Brustein cleared out all distracting underbrush in the play, like those ladies who come to visit in the final act." (Fuchs)

Whoriskey asked Brustein to establish through language that Solness came from a low class background and was a self made man. She and Brustein did this by having Solness use a more limited vocabulary "peppered with the five dollar words of a precocious student...his words are precise, efficient, but perhaps a little brutal in their directness." (Whoriskey, "First round", 2) Furthermore, she wanted to draw a link between Solness and Hilde. Both of whom are imposters pretending to be what they are not, the cracks in their façade show mainly when they become angered or emotional and the mask slips.

As mentioned earlier, Whoriskey sought a less American adaptation than Brustein was originally proposing but appreciated his work enlivening the language. Yet, she expressed concern about updating the tone of the language because. "If we keep a slight Victorian feel, then the bristling aura of female sexual hysteria will make sense. We need to believe that there is a sexual repression of women in force in the framework of the play's world, and a slightly restrained idiom may help us tremendously." (Whoriskey, "First round", 3)

In addition to establishing an air of repression, Whoriskey and Brustein used language to emphasize both class and the characters' history. Whoriskey wanted Aline Solness's rigidity and sense of perpetual mourning for her children to be embodied in both her staging and in the language Aline uses. (Whoriskey, Second round of notes email, 8/1/98) With regards to Hilde, Whoriskey worked with Brustein to shift his initial draft's language for "Hilde is reading as a girl who hasn't been exposed to the world, where she should read as a sophisticated, educated, worldly young adult albeit one with some fissures in her 'adult' façade." (ibid, 1) Not only does Whoriskey's requested adjustment add the additional element indicating Hilde's background, it also brings out an element of danger and eroticism to a character who has "all the technique to play adult games, but none of the understanding of adult consequences." (ibid, 2) Although the danger Hilde poses was incorporated into the language, it did not manifest itself fully in the acting. Elinor Fuchs comments on this element of Whoriskey's production in her otherwise rave review she noted that though she thought Kristin Flanders performance was refreshing, she felt there is a less naïve and more Strindbergian interpretation of the role which she wishes the director had examined. (Fuchs)

The interpretation Fuchs suggests is one which Whoriskey was aiming for initially. In her notes on the play she interpreted Hilde, as Brustein does, as "retribution. Malevolence. Demon. I am young and potent forever." (Whoriskey, "Notes") Though after having Hilde enter "like a spitfire" in rehearsal (Whoriskey) she backed off of that approach because, "I thought, 'No one would ever let you in – no man would think, "Oh come into my house, come be with my wife," I mean, no man would do it.' (ibid) Ultimately she felt that she should not have backed off of that idea so quickly. In hindsight she now feels that a good way "to do it is serpentine-like. I'm gonna engage you, I'm gonna gain your trust, and then at some point I'm gonna have you climb a tower, you know [*whoriskey laughs implying 'and watch you fall.'*] (ibid)

Whoriskey made sure the audience saw Solness climb and fall from the tower. Though the narcissist landscape which Whoriskey devised with her designers was quite technically complex, her staging of Solness climb and fall from the tower was innovative in its simplicity. Fuchs, who did not feel Wilson succeeded in his staging of the avalanche in *When We Dead Awaken*, described Whoriskey's solution to the final scene of *The Master Builder*, "a stunning

revelation.” (Fuchs) Again, it echoed Aurelien Lugné-Poë’s technique of relying on light and shadows on a sparsely furnished set.

It rained ash on stage, the characters sat on four low beams, and the only other object on stage was the tower. In collaboration with lighting designer Michael Chybowski, she achieved the effect of Solness climbing by having Christopher McCann, who played Solness, walk towards the audience “downstage with shaky limbs and terror in his eyes.” (ibid) A light was projected on him, which cast a shadow of Solness on the tower behind him. Solness’s shadow grew larger and larger up the tower as he walked downstage towards the light source creating an effect of him climbing the tower. This effect reflected Solness’s narcissistic sense of self which grew as he climbed the tower. Whoriskey used sound effects and blinded the audience to stage his fall. The theme of narcissism was further developed with the aftermath of his fall. As the audience was blinded she had Solness, the tower, and the four beams on which the other characters had been sitting cleared from the stage and:

the next image was a complete disorientation, so that in a way everyone is disoriented. With the narcissist, everyone has been relating to him as the origin of behavior, and without him, the whole world actually doesn’t have a sense of north-south-east-west, and then the next image the benches are gone, and they’re all just roaming the empty stage. (Whoriskey)

When Brustein approached Whoriskey to direct *The Master Builder* he knew that up until that point, she had no interest in directing classics. It was another opportunity for Brustein to engage an avant-garde director with classic text. Where Brustein felt that Thomas Haas had read his theory “too closely”, Whoriskey was given a firm foundation of both Brustein’s theory and practical training – as embodied by The Institute for Advanced Training. He told her:

I would rather give you a classic, but you’re so young, and I’m afraid of having you fail. My thought is, you can direct it and I will be your net. So I will take you through step by step and you’ll show me things, and I’ll be the co-director, but it will be a dialogue between the two of us and you’ll get a chance to direct on a main stage. (Whoriskey)

By being her net, Brustein allowed Kate Whoriskey to soar in her own exploration of Ibsen. Whoriskey expressed in her first round of notes to him on his adaptation of *The Master Builder*, the generous sense of space and support he provided her as an artist to explore,

It's a tremendously generous instinct of yours to let the draft breathe as it does. I mean to say that there's no sense that you've staked out territory along the way. You haven't cordoned off area of the text as the ultimate word on one character or the other. You haven't made final judgments. To have the generosity to put such work into the play with no pre-stamped agenda is both refreshing and startling. I couldn't have wished for more. (Whoriskey, "First round", 1)

Like Robert Wilson, who went on to direct other productions of Ibsen after encountering Brustein's vision of the playwright, Kate Whoriskey went on to direct an acclaimed major regional production of *The Lady from the Sea* at the Intiman Theatre in Seattle, Washinton, in design collaboration with John Conklin, a longtime collaborator of both Brustein and Wilson. So much of what she had learned about Ibsen from Brustein carried over into that production.

Whoriskey's successful production of *The Master Builder* can be interpreted as the ultimate expression of the culmination of Brustein's exploration of Ibsen in theory and in his theater. The production synthesized Brustein's concern for Ibsen's text and intentions as represented in such ART productions as *Hedda Gabler* and *The Wild Duck* and his interest nurturing a new American modernist non-naturalistic auteur aesthetic expressed in Robert Wilson's *When We Dead Awaken*. It is fitting that these divergent impulses were synthesized by one of Brustein's students under his guidance.

Part 9
Creating an Ibsen Culture at Yale and Harvard

Robert Brustein's bridging of theory and practice in Ibsen studies is most evident in his choice to head graduate theater programs at two of the most prestigious universities in the United States. It is not surprising that Kate Whoriskey's production of *The Master Builder* embodied a synthesis of Brustein's own concern for Ibsen's text and his interest in boldly innovative theatrical work. She had studied at his school. The Institute, like ART, reflected Brustein's vision of what American theater should be and how Ibsen should be interpreted in America. He had been teaching his views on Ibsen to his graduate students at both the Institute and, prior to that, the Yale School of Drama since the beginning. Furthermore, it was while teaching Ibsen to students during his early years as a professor at Cornell University, Vassar College, and Columbia University that he had developed his initial interpretation of Ibsen as reflected in *Ibsen and Revolt*. (Brustein)

Although Whoriskey was the student chosen to stage an Ibsen play on the mainstage of ART, she was one in a line of directing students who staged innovative Ibsen productions during their time at the Institute for Advanced Theatre Training. It is not a coincidence that students at Brustein's schools were interested in Ibsen, they were taught a compelling interpretation of his works and dramatic method and were exposed to some of the late, often neglected plays.

Brustein's Ibsen legacy from his years at the Yale School of Drama is evidenced by the fact that even after he left there was a steady commitment to Ibsen at the school. Furthermore, his students of directing, acting, design and the doctoral program in criticism/dramaturgy would impart what they had learned once they left the university. Michael Posnick, today the Director of the Department of Dance and Theatre at Manhattanville College still teaches Brustein's interpretation of Ibsen to his own students. Travis Preston who was Brustein's assistant for *The Wild Duck* at Yale went on to direct numerous innovative Ibsen productions for the American Ibsen Theater. Brustein protégé, David Schweizer, has created an acclaimed five person adaptation of *Peer Gynt* which has toured the world. Critics and dramaturgs such as Michael Feingold, who today is the chief theater critic for *The Village Voice* in New York, carry on Brustein's tradition.

Brustein left Yale University and moved his theater to Harvard in 1980. His intention was to create a graduate theater program there as well. He struggled, however, for several years to

convince the university president that a conservatory program belonged in the academic setting of Harvard University side-by-side with the theater-related courses he was teaching. In its early years, ART did not have a conservatory program. It was only when, as director Anne Bogart describes it, Brustein told the president that he was interested in creating not an art school or a conservatory but “an *institute* for advanced theatre training...[did the president respond] positively. ‘Yes. We do support institutes. This can happen.’” (Anne Bogart, *and then, you act*, 18)

Brustein brought in Richard Riddell to head the Institute. As at Yale, the acting, directing, design, and dramaturgy students studied Ibsen with Brustein in a Modern Drama course he taught at Harvard. In addition they took a class with him at the Institute called Repertory Ideals in which he would both, discuss with them his views on theater, including Ibsen, as well as bring in guest artists. The students also served as graduate assistants to Brustein and the other faculty members who taught undergraduate courses at Harvard.

As at Yale, complimenting their studies and productions at the Institute students would work on productions at ART. Directing students would serve as assistants to the mainstage directors, dramaturges would work on the productions, and actors would fill smaller roles in ART productions. In addition, guest directors would sometimes come in and work on workshop productions with Institute students, often in preparation for a future ART staging.

One of these Institute productions was *Peer Gynt* in 1989 directed by Slobodan Unkovski, a Macedonian director Brustein had invited to direct at ART. This is a play that Brustein had wanted to stage with the professional company at YRT but it never happened. Now, the Institute students had the opportunity to explore the play with an acclaimed European director as part of their training. Unkovski who was also teaching both acting and directing chose to personally direct his students as a finale of their year working together. Like Brustein, he spent considerable time analyzing the play with his actors. “His approach with actors is to build trust as he guides them through an intensive study of the text. He believes in aggressive actors, who, after analyzing the play, can fight for their space. ‘If the actor knows the play well, he will find the best way to jump into the director’s structure.’” (Elizabeth C. Ramirez)

His production, which featured a cast of ten in the Loeb Experimental Theatre, had a great impact on the actors in it and the audience who saw it. Joan Moynagh, who works at ART and saw the production, described it as “an incredible production...It was just brilliant. It was so

moving... one of the best things the theater has ever done.” (Moynagh) Though open to the public, it was not reviewed and so the only information I have about it is from those who saw it or were in it; a brief article in ART News and several production photos. Unkovski directed Ibsen’s epic play in three acts with the roles of Peer split between three actors. The production had no set and used only a few props. The action was set between two audience wagons which faced each other and gradually moved closer together between acts. The cast performed in the increasingly shrinking aisle between the audience. When Peer was home, at the wedding and in the troll kingdom there was about a 12 foot playing area. Peers world travels had a vaudevillian feel to it performed in an 8 foot space between the audience. During the last and most intimate of acts the audience on each side was nearly touching with about a four foot playing area. According to Mary Sutton, the final act of the play was especially moving and memorable. The Button Moulder was played by a particularly beautiful actress who wore a welder’s mask and wielded a blowtorch. Solveig carried a small door with her through the play. In the plays final moments as Peer maneuvered himself in the tiny aisle flanked the audience:

Solveig sat in a chair and she had a little door on her lap i.e. right between her legs, and as she was saying the last lines, [I will cradle you, I will guard you. Sleep, sleep and dream.” (Meyer, 180)] She opens the door very slowly. The image was him going towards that. And then there was a blackout. And it was so beautiful. (Mary Sutton)

Nicolette Vajtay, a first year acting student who was in the production told me that Unkovski was a quiet man whose notes were discerning and only two or three words long. He greatly admired the actors he worked with and made them feel safe. *Peer Gynt* was very well received and was invited to the Dubrovnik Festival in Yugoslavia but the trip was canceled after the visa had already been attained because of tensions in the region. (Nicolette Vajtay) Unkovski subsequently staged another production of *Peer Gynt* at SNG Drama Ljubljana in 1991.

Mary Sutton, a first year directing student at the Institute at the time, had seen Unkovski’s *Peer Gynt* and had studied directing with him. Like Whoriskey, she is an avant-garde, visual director. She also received her undergraduate training at the Experimental Theater Wing at New York University’s Tisch School of the Arts. Sutton had been Brustein’s graduate assistant and had also studied Ibsen’s late plays in his Dramatic Literature course at Harvard. She is the student who suggested to Brustein that Robert Wilson direct *When We Dead Awaken*. The

following year, she chose *Little Eyolf* which she had studied with him for her final project at the Institute. *Little Eyolf* is a play Brustein barely discusses in *The Theatre of Revolt* and has not written much about though he taught it to his students. Her designer for the production was Unkovski's long-time associate Meta Hočevar and moments of staging were inspired by Unkovski's production. In an article about her production, the influence of Brustein on Sutton is evident when she says "I discovered that the reality of the play is not a naturalistic reality." (Knapp, ART News, May 1990) She was attracted to the play's themes of:

Sexual guilt and personal transformation...It depicts human beings forced by things out of their control to attempt living with greater spiritual awareness. Part of the process involves the deconstruction of one's personal and social identity and the exposure of a human being's soft core. (ibid)

In my conversation with Sutton about the play she elaborated about what attracted her about it. Like Brustein she linked the characters in the play to Ibsen himself:

Ibsen deconstructed himself, his whole self, at the end and all of these things were coming together in these plays as symbols... And they're all deconstructed. To me *Little Eyolf* was such a combination of grasping towards the mythological and still trying to deal with the human realm. It's the one play which is a crossover. It's in this netherworld and it's also firmly rooted in a marriage, and the loss of a child (Mary Sutton)

Her production was visually stunning and technically complex. In collaboration with her designer, Meta Hočevar, she expressed "the inner world and the outer world being translucent, and this family being stuck in between being of the world and not being able to contact each other." (Mary Sutton)

The final Institute production which I will discuss is Bart DeLorenzo's 1990 *Hedda Gabler* with Nicolette Vajtay playing Hedda. In our conversation, DeLorenzo mentioned that he had assisted Andrei Serban on his production of Carlo Gozzi's *The Serpent Woman* at ART. Just as Brustein's approach to staging Ibsen was influenced by Serban, so was DeLorenzo's. DeLorenzo had studied at Yale as an undergraduate after Brustein had already left but he had read *The Theatre of Revolt* there and greatly admired the work produced at ART when he was in high school. Serban was the greatest influence on his directing life.

For his production of *Hedda Gabler*, which he described to me as his "attempt at a symbolist interpretation", (DeLorenzo, email) he had a fellow Institute student create a spare adaptation of the text. The production stripped down the Victorian aspects of the play though it

was staged at Harvard's Agassiz Theater, an old vaudeville wooden theater with red velvet curtains and a piano and a Victorian love seat. Much of his production was staged down in the orchestra with the piano and oven up on the stage. The set was comprised mostly of stacks of books. The Tesman's had just returned from their honeymoon and had barely unpacked. Hedda, dressed in red, was trapped in her husband's world of books. Vajtay described her approach to the role as "a trapped animal whose only way out is to kill herself." (Nicolette Vajtay) Like the non-naturalistic approach Brustein advocates, DeLorenzo employed techniques he had seen Serban use, in which moments in a scene are broken down and slowed down to explore the ambiguity of feeling of a moment. He visually expressed Thea Elvsted feeling lost without Eilert Løvborg by having her spin around the stage. His production had a visual filmic flair with scenes jump-cutting from one to the next propelling the action forward without scene transitions or an intermission.

In my interview with him, DeLorenzo reiterated that in his production he aimed to find the poem in the play. Slobodan Unkovski, at the end of the year review said that he liked the fresh approach that DeLorenzo had taken with the material. He also liked how DeLorenzo used jump cuts to move the play from scene to scene. Brustein, however, was less enthused. He felt that DeLorenzo, who was a first year student at the time, needed more skill and finesse in exploring the play's subtext in an overt manner, which is tricky with a play which is about suppression. (DeLorenzo) Brustein's critique is of particular note: Two years later he had Adrian Hall direct a "straight forward" production which was set in its original time period and place in order to accentuate the period's oppressive atmosphere.

Brustein's choice to create theater training programs in a university setting and affiliate them with theaters he had founded is an important part of his contribution to the emergence of a new Ibsen culture in the United States. It was through his work with students that his initial theory first emerged and it was his students who have continued his legacy. Students studied Ibsen's plays with Brustein at the university and with teachers like Slobodan Unkovski in the rehearsal room. They then interpreted the works through their art. In the case of Mary Sutton the result was three fold. She was introduced to the play *Little Eyolf* in a course she took at Harvard with Brustein. She then chose to direct *Little Eyolf* and was inspired theatrically by Unkovski's *Peer Gynt* which she saw at the Institute. Finally, after studying *When We Dead Awaken* in Brustein's course, she suggested that Robert Wilson would be the ideal director for that play.

Robert Brustein, in turn, convinced Wilson to direct the first of what would be three Ibsen productions. It was seen by audiences in Boston, Houston, and São Paulo. It is this joint university-conservatory-theater setting, which Brustein pioneered, that best bridges theory and practice in Ibsen's plays.

Part 10

Conclusion

Robert Brustein's contribution to Ibsen studies expressed through the theory he has developed, the plays he has produced and at times directed, and his bridging of theory and practice has been largely ignored in the field of Ibsen studies. His contribution was even ignored by scholars such as Frederick J. and Lise-Lone Marker, whose approach is centered upon the staging of Ibsen's plays. To fill this gap in Ibsen studies I have mapped out and analyzed the development of his theory, how the theory shaped the Ibsen productions at his theaters, and conversely how the productions influenced the further development of both his theory and later productions. What emerges is a dialogue between Ibsen scholarship and performance - disciplines which too often ignore each other but which Brustein himself has engaged throughout his work.

In his role as scholar, critic, educator, producer, and practitioner Brustein has exemplified the robust Ibsen culture which emerges when the two sides of Ibsen come into dialogue with one another. In contrast to the boredom of Ibsen in the English speaking academy described by Toril Moi, I have shown that Brustein's integrating of theory and practice in the university settings of Yale/YRT and Harvard/ART yielded exciting results for scholars and practitioners. This is reflected in his articles "The Crack in the Chimney" and "The Fate of Ibsenism" as well as in his commitment to engage the avant-garde with Ibsen's work. Though the Markers ignore him, my analysis illustrates how he reinvigorated the American theater in general and the American approach to Ibsen in particular by bringing the European tradition of Ibsen exploration to the American stage.

Brustein is a passionate, innovative advocate of Ibsen. He understands that Ibsen is far from being irrelevant. The American theater develops, in Brustein's view, upon the interpretation of Ibsen on which it is based. For that reason he relentlessly countered the prose-realist interpretation of Ibsen advocated by Arthur Miller and developed his own alternate poetic and non-causal interpretation which he presented in his writings, on his stages, and to his students.

As Rick Davis, the founder of The American Ibsen Theater, illustrates, Brustein's major contribution to Ibsen theory "The Crack in the Chimney" epitomizes Brustein's bridging of theory and practice: "Brustein's work, especially 'The Crack in the Chimney,' remains an important contribution to the shift in Ibsen studies and production away from a purely psycho-social, realistic approach and toward something more mysterious, theatrical, and liberating." (Rick Davis, email) His legacy to Ibsen studies then, therefore, is the synthesis of theory and practice. The resulting Ibsen culture is reflected in the university-conservatory-theater model he has developed, the articles he has written, and the artist, scholars, and students he has inspired in their engagement with Ibsen and who have continue to created fresh and new productions and interpretations of Ibsen's work.

Appendix A
Cast Information
A Company of Ibsen Actors

Robert Brustein believed in developing a company of actors. There were several company members who played a diverse group of Ibsen roles in diverse productions at YRT/ART.

***When We Dead Awaken* YRT Fall 1971**

David Hurst as Rubek was not only acting in the plays at YRT, but also served as an associate professor in acting at the School of Drama for the year. As Irene, Nancy Wickwire was coming in as the star, with a solid background as a stage actress, including an award-winning turn in *Rosemersholm* in New York several years earlier, and a prior appearance with YRT in *Coriolanus* in 1968. She had spent the past two years on a popular television soap opera *Another World*. The remaining principals included Sarah Albertson, a Yale School of Drama graduate and company member and Carmen de Lavallade, a dancer, alternating the roles of Maia and the Nun. Recent Yale School of Drama graduate Stephen Mendillo was cast as Squire Ulfheim. The cast was rounded out by Bill Gearhart, a student at the Yale School of Drama, as the Supervisor of the Springs; Joseph Johnsky as Lars; and Marty Lafferty, another student, as the Waiter. Haas cast 2 young girls and 2 young boys as the children in the production, which also featured live animals and a string quartet. (YRT *When We Dead Awaken* Program)

***The Wild Duck* YRT Spring 1978**

Mrs. Soerby was played by Brustein's late wife Norma, an accomplished actress in her own right, who was on the acting faculty at Yale. Haakon Werle was played by Shepperd Strudwick, a veteran professional actor and the role was understudied by Robert Brustein himself; Christopher Walken, an Yale Rep alum who returned to YRT to play Gregers Werle after completing filming for *The Deer Hunter* for which he would win an Academy Award; YRT company member Eugene Troobnick played Hjalmar Ekdal; long time company member Jeremy Geidt played Old Ekdal, Gina Ekdal was performed by Marianne Owen, a second year student at Yale. She would go on to play Mrs. Soerby in the American Repertory Theatre production of the play in 1996. Hedvig was played by Blanche Baker, an actress who made her company debut the previous season. Lee Richardson who had previously been in residence at YRT in 1970/71

played Relling, and William Roberts was Molvik. In the cameo roles, Michael Gross was Pettersen; Douglas Simes was Jensen; Bruce A. Siddons was Graaberg; The dinner guests in act one were played by William E. Browne, William Foeller, Bill Keller, Jonathan Marks, H.S. Murphy, Geoffrey Pierson, Jim Pigott, Robert Snow, and Herman Zommick. The Two Lovers photographed in Ekdals studio where played by Polly Draper and Tony Shalhoub. (YRT *The Wild Duck* Program)

***Ghosts* ART Spring 1982**

The cast of *Ghosts* included Jeremy Geidt, a long time company member, as Engstrand. He would go on to play Haakon Werle in the 1996 ART production of *The Wild Duck* and Knut Brovik in *The Master Builder* in 1999. Cherry Jones, as Regina Engstrand. Alvin Epstein, the associate director of both ART and previously YRT, as Pastor Manders. He would go on to play Arnold Rubek in Robert Wilson's *When We Dead Awaken* and Judge Brack in Adrian Hall's production of *Hedda Gabler*. In 1978 he directed *The Pretenders* at the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis. Mrs. Alvin was played by Kathleen Widdoes, an acclaimed New York based actress, who had been a company member at YRT in its early years. Oswald Alving was played John Bellucci, a recent Harvard graduate. He would go on to understudy the role in a different major production of the play the following year opposite Liv Ullmann's Mrs. Alving. That production received a bad review by the "Boston Globe" critic Kevin Kelly who in his critique spoke longingly of Brustein's far more effective production at ART the prior season. (Kelly, *Ullmann Ghosts*)

***When We Dead Awaken* Spring 1991 ART**

The cast of *When We Dead Awaken* included Alvin Epstein, whose Ibsen credits at ART have been previously listed as Arnold Rubek; Stephanie Roth, a company member who would go on to play Tea Elvsted the following season and whom had previously worked with Peter Brook, as Maja Rubek; Charles "Honi" Coles, a legendary tap dancer and blues singer/songwriter as The Manager of the Spa. He also composed word and lyrics to the 'knee plays'. A 'knee play' is Wilson's term for short vaudevillesque routines which he uses in his work to introduced each act. They serve, for him, as joints linking the show together, and function in counterpoint to the tone of the play. Mario Arrambide, a company member, as Ulfhejm; Elzbieta Czyzewska, an

acclaimed Polish actress who had been a company member at YRT, and Sheryl Sutton, a dancer who had been in Robert Wilson's productions for 20 years including *Einstein on the Beach*. Together they played the role of Irene. Sheryl Sutton, who is African American essentially played Elzbieta Czyzewska's shadow. Steven Skybell, who would go on to play Eilert Løvborg the following season, as Lars, Margaret Hall, another associate of Wilson's, as the Maid; and Michael Starr, a first year acting student at the Institute for Advance Theatre Training, as the Manservant. The ensemble was rounded out by Celeste Ciulla, Jennifer Roszell, Stephanie Simpson, all Institute actors, and Reed Cottingham, Patty Goldman, Bina Martin, and Jeanne Simpson, all Harvard undergraduates. (Plotkins 93)

The production was invited to the Twenty First International Biennale of São Paulo, Brazil in October 1991.

It was performed at the Biennale with a cast that included Joel Grey as Rubek, Tisha Roth as Maja, John Seitz as Ulfheim, and Elzbieta Czeewska, Sheryl Sutton, and Charles "Honi" Coles reprising their roles. (Robert Orchard, "The São Paulo Follies", ART News Nov. 91)

***Hedda Gabler* ART 1992**

The cast for *Hedda Gabler* included Candy Buckley, in her third season at ART as Hedda; Michael Rudko in his first season at ART as George Tesman; Stephanie Roth, who had just played Maya the previous season as Thea Elvsted; Steven Skybell, who had played Lars Ulfheim's servant, as Eilert Løvborg, Alvin Epstein, Wilson's Rubek, as Judge Brack; Barbara Dooneief Haas made her ART debut as Aunt Juliana; and Kate Burke, in her first season as the Maid.

The season was also notable for the decision to cast some company members in similar roles in different plays – for example, the actor playing Medvedenko, the unfortunate husband in *The Seagull* also played Tesman in *Hedda Gabler*. (Plotkins, 101)

***The Wild Duck* ART 1996**

The cast included Jeremy Geidt, a company and faculty member since the early days at Yale, who had played Old Ekdal in Brustein's YRT production, played Håkon Werle; Jerome Kilty, as Old Ekdal; Will LeBow as Hjalmar Ekdal; Stephen Rowe, a founding member of ART and graduate of the Yale School of Drama under Brustein's deanship as Gregers Werle; Marianne Owen, another founding member of ART who had played Gina in Brustein's YRT production, as Mrs. Sørby; Karen MacDonald, also a founding member of ART as Gina Ekdal; Emma Roberts, a seventeen year old actress who was the youngest person ever accepted to the Institute, as Hedwig Ekdal; Jack Willis as Relling; Remo Airaldi as Molvik; James Sobol as Pettersen; Jason Fisher as The Short-Sighted Guest; Michael Ryan as The Thin-Haired Guest; and Jason Weinberg as The Fat Guest.

***The Master Builder* ART 1999**

The cast included Christopher McCann as Halvard Solness; Sharon Scruggs, as Aline Solness; Will Lebow, who had played Hjalmar Ekdal in *The Wild Duck*, as Dr. Herdal; Jeremy Geidt, a founding company member who had been in several previously discussed Ibsen productions, as Knut Brovik; Benjamin Evett, in his seventh season at ART, as Ragnar Brovik; Aysan Çelik, as second year Institute student, as Kaja Fosli; and Kristin Flanders, as Hilde Wangel.

Appendix B The Ibsen Seasons

When We Dead Awaken opened the first season in which fulfilled Brustein's goal of performing in true rotating repertory. He had created the theater as a laboratory which would introduce both his students and the greater audience to new works, the great classics, and new methods in directing and theater practice. Brustein believed that a rotating repertory:

“will expose spectators to as many as three plays during a single week. Rotating repertory permits an actor to stretch himself in a variety of roles simultaneously, alternating small parts with large ones in plays from a great variety of periods and styles...In diversifying the theatre experience, rotating repertory creates the potential for a higher level of artistic achievement and thus becomes an inevitable sign of progress and portent of the future.” (Yale Repertory Season Brochure 1971)

Although the rotating repertory system is quite common in Europe, it was not (and still is not) common in the United States. Brustein's advocacy of the system reflects both the European influence on his vision, as well as his view that the place of the university-theater model was to educate and develop the cultural sensibilities of students, practitioners, and audiences. Here is a listing of the plays that were produced in the same season with Brustein's Ibsen productions:

***When We Dead Awaken* YRT Fall 1971**

When We Dead Awaken directed by Thomas B. Haas opened the season and was performed in repertory with the world premiere of Lonnie Carter's farce *Big House*, directed by Robert Brustein, and later with Camus's *Caligula* directed by Alvin Epstein. The season also included productions of Brecht/Weill's *Happy End*; Barca's *Life is a Dream*; *The Tubs* by Terrence McNally and *Passion/Stops* by Edward Bond and Robert Auletta.

***The Wild Duck* YRT Spring 1978**

The Wild Duck directed by Brustein began previews April 4, 1978, Opened April 7, 1978 and ran until May 13, 1978. It was performed in repertory with *Wings* by Arthur Kopit directed by John Madden in a season that included productions of Brecht's *Man is Man* directed by Ron Daniels and *Sganarelle: An Evening of Moliere Farces* directed by Andrei Serban.

***Ghosts* ART Spring 1982**

ART's production of *Ghosts* was adapted and directed by Robert Brustein. It was scheduled to open "by some sublime coincidence" almost 100 years to the day of the world premiere, which also took place in the United States. (Brustein, "The A.R.T. News", May 1982).

Ghosts was the first ART production of a work by Ibsen. ART's 3rd season also includes remounts of Andrei Serban's production of *Sganarelle: an evening of Moliere farces* which was originally produced at YRT the same season as Brustein's *The Wild Duck*; the American premiere of George Handel's *Orlando* directed by Peter Sellars; *The Journey of the Fifth Horse* adapted from a Turgenev story, directed by Adrian Hall, who would later direct ART's *Hedda Gabler*; and a world premiere of the play *Orchids in the Moonlight* by Carlos Fuentes. Along with these mainstage shows *True West* by Sam Shepard (a playwright who Brustein promoted in "Theatre in the Age of Einstein: The Crack in the Chimney") premiered, as well as Robert Auletta's play *Rundown*. (Plotkin).

In conjunction with the production ART presented:

Ibsen By Ibsen

a dramatic reading of the stirring letters and prophetic notes of the Norwegian master. In them, Ibsen reveals the depths of his fear for the human race, and the seriousness of his effort to stave off disaster through the exercise of his art. Henrik Ibsen often appears to us as a cold, remote, archaic figure; in *Ibsen By Ibsen* we will see a very human, fallible figure in passionate, fretful love with the future of mankind. (Brustein, "The A.R.T. News", May 1982)

ART's programming of *Ibsen By Ibsen* in conjunction with *Ghosts* underscores Brustein's commitment to providing a context for the audience watching the play as well as the theater's commitment to developing an Ibsen culture and audience. He was dedicated not only to educate his audience about the classics and new ways of staging them, but also to enlightening them about the great, relevant writers who wrote them.

***When We Dead Awaken* ART Spring 1991**

During ART's 12th season, Brustein produced Robert Wilson's *When We Dead Awaken* a co-production with Houston, Texas's Alley Theatre in a season which included Harold Pinter's *The Homecoming*; Kaufman and Hart's *Once in a Lifetime* directed by Anne Bogart; *King Lear* by Adrian Hall, who would go on to direct *Hedda Gabler* for ART the following season; *Power Failure*, a world premiere by Larry Gelbart on the mainstage. There was also the American premiere of *The Writing Game* by David Lodge and the world premiere of the musical *Steel* by the poet Derek Walcott and composer Galt MacDermot. (Plotkins)

The exhibition "Robert Wilson's Vision", a major retrospective of Wilson's fine art was on view at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston concurrent with the production. The exhibition traveled on to Houston's Contemporary Arts Museum as well.

In conjunction with the production, ART hosted a free panel discussion on titled "Modern Drama and Postmodern Theatre: Robert Wilson's Staging of Henrik Ibsen's *When We Dead Awaken*" with John Conklin, Arthur Holmberg, Thomas Postlewait, Evert Sprinchorn, and Sheryl Sutton. It was moderated by Robert Brustein, again showing his commitment not only for developing both an Ibsen culture and audience.

The production was invited to and performed at the Twenty First International Biennale of São Paulo, Brazil in October 1991. Originally, ART was planning on touring *When We Dead Awaken* in Europe. Arrangements were being made to open the 1991 Ibsen Stage Festival in Oslo with the production. That tour would have been cosponsored by the Belgrade International Theater Festival. But because of the brewing tensions in Yugoslavia, the Oslo/Belgrade tour fell apart. The Festival d'Automne in Paris was also interested in the production but that possibility was not pursued because it would have conflicted with the Ibsen Stage Festival schedule. (Robert Orchard, "The São Paulo Follies", ART News Nov. 91)

***Hedda Gabler* ART 1992**

In addition to Adrian Hall's *Hedda Gabler*, Season Thirteen (1991-92) at ART included Mainstage productions of *Hamlet* directed by Ron Daniels; *Misalliance* by George Bernard Shaw; Chekhov's *The Seagull* also directed by Ron Daniels; *The Servant of Two Masters* by Carlo Goldoni directed by Andrei Belgrader. In the smaller theater (Hasty Puddings) there was the World premiere of Christopher Durang's play *Media Amok* directed by Les Waters and *Oleanna* written and directed by David Mamet. (Plotkins)

In conjunction with the production, ART hosted a free panel discussion on *Hedda Gabler* with Harold Bloom, Rolf Fjelde, and Carol Gilligan. It was moderated by Robert Brustein. As with its programming for the previous Ibsen productions, the free panel with major scholars underscored Brustein and ART's commitment to both developing an Ibsen audience and culture.

***The Wild Duck* ART 1996**

François Rochaix's crowd pleasing production opened Season Eighteen of ART and also marked the start of his directorship of the Institute for Advanced Theater Training. The mainstage season continued with a remounting of Brustein's acclaimed staging of Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, a remounting of ART's acclaimed production of *The King Stag* by Carlo Gozzi, *Woyzek* by George Buchner, the World Premiere of a stage version of *The Cabinet of Dr. Calligari* by John Moran directed by Bob McGrath, *Man and Superman* by G.B. Shaw directed by David Wheeler. On the smaller stages there was the American premiere of the musical *Punch and Judy Get a Divorce*, *When the World Was Green (A Chef's Fable)* by Sam Shephard and Joseph Chaikin, directed by Joseph Chaikin, and the World Premiere of *The Old Neighborhood* by David Mamet. (Plotkins)

***The Master Builder* ART 1999**

Brustein chose *The Master Builder* for inclusion in ART's 20th Season. *The Master Builder* directed by Kate Whoriskey performed on the mainstage in repertory with the world premiere of Valparaiso directed by Don DeLillo,. The rest of the season included Paula Vogel's *How I Learned to Drive*, *Phaedra* by Racine, *The Merchant of Venice* directed by Andrei Serban, *The Cripple of Inishman* by Martin McDonagh. On the smaller stage were a revival of Christoher

Durang's *The Marriage of Bette and Boo*, the world premiere of *Charlie in the House of Rue* based on a Robert Coover novella and directed by Bob McGrath, and the world premiere of *Boston Marriage*, written and directed by David Mamet. (Plotkins)

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